"Where there is no vision the people perish"

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THE POETIC DRAMA

IT is unfortunate, that for the modern playgoer, the term poetic drama has a somewhat narrow connotation. It is commonly thought of, as a brave experiment in verse, of what is conveyed more plausibly in the realistic dialogue to which they are accustomed, a departure from the norm and better left to the "art theatres." How little is it realised that until the last few centuries verse not only was the customary medium for the play but the only one. Until the seventeenth century, a recent period in the long development of culture, drama was a thing of passion and imagination, and as poetry of all human speech is the most vital, it was used without question.

The origins of drama were essentially ecstatic. We know that in the dawn of history, man growing conscious of the workings of Nature, its cycle of seasons, growth and decay, practised the ritualistic dance to supplicate the dark powers for the fertility of the earth, on which their well-being was dependent. In the expression of these elementary desires, action and mime preceded speech, but the very pith of drama was there, the physique of man used to interpret the mysteries of life. This Nature worship, which frequently became an orgy, attended by the sacrifice of goats and cattle, was the basis of one of the noblest phases of the theatre.

From out of the ancient fertility rites arose the conception of "hubris" or pride, which dominates Greek tragedy. The primitive mind saw that all things grew to maturity and died, and that death heralded re-birth in endless cycle. This is the idea behind countless myths in every part of the world—that of Persephone and the Red Indian legend of the maize-god Mondamin, who is slaughtered and reincarnated in the golden grain.

By the time we come to fifth-century Greece the idea has become invested with a deep religious significance (the very word tragedy or goat-song makes clear its pagan ancestry), pride being understood as a relentless law, underlying not only physical Nature, but the conduct of man. He must grow to his full stature, fulfil his destiny, but his pride in so doing incurs the anger of the gods and so he is struck down. Atonement must be made. This idea of a relentless nemesis is distasteful to the modern mind, but as it happened to stir the creative impulse of a group of giant dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, their tragedies still carry with them a sublimity and awe that must move the most sophisticated of modern audiences. They were first produced at the feast of Dionysus, at Athens, in the month of March, and this deity had come to signify not so much earthly fructification, as the growth of man's spiritual powers, his urge to self-achievement. Thus, the drama had for the Athenians a profound meaning.

By this time the spoken word had been added to, though not replaced, the mime of the primitive festivals, and the spoken word being the

expression of minds of culture and vision, was for that reason, great poetry. The strongly-rhythmical quality of classic drama is rarely emphasised sufficiently in modern productions. The impression usually given us is of something static and oratorical. The plays on the contrary, as they were originally performed, were in a constant flux, the chorus making a pattern of movement and colour to elaborate the lines of the chief actors as they were thundered across the amphitheatre. In a place so vast, no attempt at intimate acting could be made, and the emotional atmosphere had to be achieved by ballet-like groupings and expansive gesture—the convention of masks and buskins was to this end—and above all a strongly-emphasised declamation. To the citizens, crowded round the arena, where, beneath the blue southern sky, colour, movement and sound blended in a significant harmony, it must have been a time of exalted experience.

This uprush of dramatic creation came to an end with the passing of these great men and in fact soon suffered complete eclipse when the Romans, those forerunners of the "tired business men," who so reduce the standard of entertainment in our own times, substituted the spectacle and gladiatorial combat for the play.

Throughout the Middle Ages, however, drama was reborn beneath the shelter of the Church, and simple folk recreated for themselves the stories of the Scriptures and again verse was used which sometimes attained to a sweet Christian poetry. Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, cries :

> Ah my sovereyn Lord, why whylt thou not speke
> To me that am thi modyr in peyn for thi wrong ?
> Ah hert ! hert ! why whylt thou not breke ?
> That I were out of this sorwe so stronge !

But it is not until we come to Renaissance England that the theatre again reaches to the heights of powerful and passionate utterance. With the Elizabethans, however, the fervour was not aroused by a religious concept, but the play became the expression of that riotous egotism, that "vaulting ambition" that was typical of the times. It ceased to be in any way ritualistic. In fact, there could be no more striking contrast of any two performances than the Classic and Renaissance, except that in both cases they attained superlative poetry.

In the hastily-built wooden "Os" of "The Globe" and "The Swan" there was little attempt made at formal beauty or polished prosody, although these virtues were admired by the scholars of the time. The productions were, on the other hand, untidy and rambling, often too quickly written and with impromptu patches, and told not of the ways of the gods, but of the triumph and suffering of humanity itself. The

central idea shifted its focus from being an impersonal fate to a calamity that arose from some inherent weakness of the human soul. Man, embodied in a Faustus, Macbeth, or Hamlet, is his own tragedy.

For this more complex philosophy, which comes close to the modern outlook, a malleable verse form was essential. Blank verse first used to great declamatory effect by Marlowe, with great artistry by Ford and Webster, and with supreme genius by Shakespeare, answered all the demands made of it. The adventure-loving audiences demanded action, a sensational story, as much as the revelation of strong passions and aspirations. Blank verse provided a ten-syllable line, easily manageable for the players, and the abandonment of rhyme and the habit of run-on lines that took its place meant that the whole could be conveyed in every variety of tempo and cadence, to cover every mood and so it become the perfect vehicle for the plays of this period. Once again poetry and drama had fused in an exhilarating union, with this time an emphasis on psychology that was to be the main concern of the theatre down to our own day. On the contemporary stage, characterisation is so closely associated with work-a-day speech, that for us to hear players express themselves metrically is to feel they are a little remote from reality, but in Shakespeare it adds an intensity to personalities far beyond the power of prose, and, as always happens in great art, the particular is thus invested with universal significance. Only poetry could bring out the agony of Othello's feelings at the moment he is going to take Desdemona's life, "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul," or the utter staleness that the slow rhythm and autumnal imagery suggests in Macbeth's lines, "Take thy face hence, Seyton! I am sick at heart."

How poetry intensifies the macabre quality of Webster's tragedies! Repeatedly sensuous beauty throws into contrast his themes of avarice and murder. The Duchess of Malfi speaks to her assassins :

> What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut
> With diamonds ? or to be smothered
> With cassia ? or to be shot to death with pearls ?
> I know death hath ten thousand several doors
> For men to take their exits . . . .

We cannot doubt that such passages were exploited to the full by the actors who were by this time professionals and received a thorough training in speech, dancing and music. The poet as a rule produced his own plays and wrote always with the living voice in mind. It was this healthy alliance between the physical conditions of the stage and the inspiration of its dramatists that accounts for its supremacy at this time.

The closing of the play-houses in 1642 by the Puritans was a blow from which the English theatre took a long time to recover. In the next

phase of any note in this country we find that with Restoration comedy, the play is no longer the expression of popular feeling, but has become the precious entertainment of the Court. It is witty, well made, but the poetry has gone.

From this time through the next two centuries the drama can hardly be considered as an art at all. Sheridan and Goldsmith represent pleasant oases in an arid tract that reaches the present. True, certain poets of the last century made efforts to restore its dignity. Shelley wrote "The Cenci," Browning "The Blot on Scutcheon," for the well-known actor of the day, Macready, Tennyson "Becket," but these were purely literary works, and although they contained much fine descriptive verse, they were written without any theatre sense. Those that did attain performance proved quite sterile. It had been forgotten that the poet-dramatist must function differently from the lyricist, for his is least pure of all the arts and has to be dependent on the talents and temperaments of others to quicken his work. If he forgets this his own contribution will be of small value.

Not until very recent times has there been any successful union of the two Muses, but before this the theatre was to undergo a revolutionary phase known as "Naturalism." It was inevitable that after the tawdry melodrama and cheap farce which entertained the Victorians, something of this sort was bound to develop unless the theatre was to perish of its own inanition. The play had lost contact with life altogether, possessing neither poetry or plausibility. The attitude of the intellectuals towards it was best expressed in Carlyle's contemtuous phrase, "A box of tricks." Strangely enough it was a time of brilliant players, Henry Irving, Coquelin, Eleonora Duse, Sarah Bernhardt all reigned supreme, but their dramatic material, unless they appeared in the classics, was of the shoddiest. It was even known for Shakespeare to be re-arranged to give greater scope for the bravura of the star players. A reaction was due. "Naturalism" in the extreme manner of most reactions set up an ideal of detailed fidelity to life. All heightened effect was now to be avoided. Romance must go and verse forms give way to a dialogue near as possible to the common speech.

The movement was evident over the whole of Europe and influenced all creative effort, but for the subversive effect it had on the theatre, we have most to thank that sultry genius of Norway, Henrik Ibsen. Revolting against the sham conventions of the day he wrote a number of powerful works that upset audiences for years and entirely changed the trend of the drama throughout the Continent. These plays used a dialogue that was studiously unpoetic, and as near the vernacular as was compatible with theatrical effectiveness. Ibsen, in a letter to the actress, Lucy Wolf,

deplored the use of verse at all on the stage. "Verse has done immense injury to the art of the theatre . . .

"It is most unlikely that the verse form will be employed to any extent worth mentioning in the drama of the immediate future; for the dramatic aims of the future will pretty certainly be incompatible with it. It is therefore doomed to extinction. I myself, for the last seven or eight years have hardly written a single verse, but have cultivated exclusively the incomparably more difficult art of poetic creation in the plain, unvarnished speech of reality . . . ." His themes—most daring innovation, were current social problems. Vested interests, sexual morality, feminism, these were the ideas behind "Enemy of the People," "Ghosts," "The Doll's House," pieces that by their unorthodoxy, raised a hornet's nest of disapproval. But the social drama had come to stay. Ibsen found a champion in this country in the person of a red-headed Irishman, George Bernard Shaw, who trounced the critics and produced at great speed a series of brilliant satiric comedies, going farther than the Norwegian in his use of the stage as an instrument of propaganda. The same trend was evident elsewhere. Brieux in France, Hauptmann in Germany, Tolstoy in Russia, concentrated on the realistic interpretation of contemporary issues.

Thus, vitality was restored and the play, after a lapse of many years, echoed the thought and spirit of the age. There followed in England a very spate of writers in the new manner, John Galsworthy, Elizabeth Baker, Granville Barker, Stanley Houghton, and many more. The repertory system that opened up in the provinces encouraged the study of regional drama and the use of dialect.

Too soon, however, the original impulse of realism degenerated into mere representation, a photographic accuracy that meant that the movement was to a great extent spent. The theatre was in danger of unforgivable crime-dullness! Was it now possible for realism to be charged with poetry, or were these two a contradiction in terms?

These last few years have seen some most interesting experiments by the younger men who have felt that the purpose of the play is to exalt no less than to instruct. Realism, too, emphasised the drabber aspect of modern life, the pathos and frustration that went with much of the economic system, but the soul of man in spite of this is inevitably resilient. It must hope, aspire, overleap itself. Herein lies its nobility. The plays of the realist told only half the story. To express the essential dignity of man, poetry had to invade a pedestrian prose, for poetry is speech touched with imagination. Yet how could a poetic drama be achieved which would avoid the stilted and archaic? Should verse forms be abandoned? For poetry need not of necessity be strictly metrical. Any

speech that stimulates overtones in the mind can be accounted poetic. Blank verse in its strong association with the Shakespearian stage is dangerous. It was exploited so fully in his time that any modern writer fears the comparison. Other forms, rhymed couplets, and those as rigid, are unsuitable for the purpose of the modern play, which is still modernistic in theme.

Certain writers of to-day have captured a poetic quality without the means of verse. In particular, Sean O'Casey and John Millington Synge, who have, however, an advantage that the speech of their country is already richly imaginative, and the voices of Irish players full of lovely cadences. Yet both men are realist in that their work is built on a shrewd observation of the life of the people and not a sentimental tissue.

Synge's "Playboy of the Western World," one of the finest achievements of the modern theatre, proves that poetry and naturalism can be jointly attained. The Elizabethans of course did not trouble about plausibility. Most of their themes, borrowed from abroad, were wildly improbable. Nothing mattered but the mental and emotional exhilaration, but the modern audience expects credibility.

O'Casey is more socially-minded than Synge. His work, in fact, is often ablaze with indignation at the stupidities of a section of his countrymen, their fanatical nationalism and prejudice, but in his plays too, there is the vision.

When verse is employed by playwrights of to-day, it is often experimental. There is a desire to find new rhythms to express the restless sceptical temper of modern life.

T. S. Eliot, in his play, "Murder in the Cathedral," uses every device of prosody, from the chorus of women used on the Greek model, which keeps up a running commentary on the main action of the play, to the doggerel verse, reminiscent of Negro jazz hymns, used satirically to suggest the blasphemy of the murderers :

> Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb ?
> Are you marked with the mark of the Beast ?
> Come down David to the lion's den,
> Come down David and join the feast.

Satiric again are the pious intonings of the priests in :

> Oh Thomas, my Lord, do not fight the intractable tide,
> Do not sail the irresistible wind.

"Murder in the Cathedral" is most ingeniously contrived, but one feels that, taken in the whole, it just misses its aim. Poetry and drama have not quite fused to the point of stirring the emotion. It is perhaps, too ingenious.

In Auden and Isherwood's "Dog beneath the Skin" the fault is the

same. It is more dextrous than moving. But their later play, "The Ascent of F 6," has an excitement of theme and treatment. It is cast in the form of an allegory, and the implications are complex, as is the tendency in modern writing.

One who has perhaps reached the farthest with poetic realism is the American, Maxwell Anderson, with his remarkable work "Winterset." He was prompted to write in verse, he says, in his preface, because he was "weary of plays in prose that never lifted from the ground." The setting of "Winterset" is a squalid waterfront, its characters of the underworld, but the whole glows with a beauty like a sunset on a barren scene. Miriamne, the little Jewess, has just learned that her brother, in fear of the gun-man Trock, has suppressed evidence and caused an innocent man to be found guilty of murder. The following brief conversation fully reveals the character of the three, from which arises the tragedy; the girl's uncompromising idealism, the father's readiness to come to terms with life, and the brother's vacillation between the two:

EDRAS: Yet till it's known you bear no guilt at all—
unless you wish. The days go by like film,
like a long written scroll, a figured veil
unrolling out of darkness on to fire
and utterly consumed. And on this veil,
running in sounds and symbols of men's minds
reflected back, life flickers and is shadow
going toward flame. Only what men can see
exists in that shadow. Why must you rise and cry out:
That was I, there in the ravelled tapestry,
there, in that pistol flash, when the man was killed.
I was there, and was one, and am bloodstained!
Let the wind
and fire take that hour to ashes out of time
and out of mind! This thing that men call justice,
this blind snake that strikes men down in the dark,
mindless with fury, keep your hand back from it,
pass by in silence—let it be forgotten, forgotten!
Oh, my son, my son—have pity!

MIRIAMNE: But if it was true
and someone died—than it was more than shadow—
and doesn't blow away—

GARTH: Well, it was true.

ESDRAS: Say it if you must. If you have heart to die,
say, and let them take what's left—there was little
to keep, even before—

GARTH: Oh, I'm a coward—
I always was. I'll be quiet and live. I'll live
even if I have to crawl, I know.

MIRIAMNE: Is it better
to tell a lie and live?
ESDRAS: Yes, child, it's better.
MIRIAMNE: But if I had to do it—
I think I'd die.
ESDRAS: Yes, child. Because you're young.
MIRIAMNE: Is that the only reason?
ESDRAS: The only reason.

Here the language is arranged with a skilled simplicity and the imagery used (recalling Macbeth's walking shadows) contemporary, but the effect is the very reverse of crude or banal.

It would seem then that there is a growing conviction among those interested in the potentialies of the theatre that realism is not enough, that if it is to avoid superficiality, it must be welded to a vital and imaginative speech. If, however, the drama, informed as it is by social awareness, and made sensitive by humanitarianism, takes wing, there may well come about another "Golden Age."

B.A., author and producer. MAMIE GRIFFITHS.

ELEGY FOR AN ANNIVERSARY

(for Priscilla)

EXAMINE the progress of the years,
What they hold and what they do not hold,
What do you hold then most in your memory,
The rocky mountains, the quiet valleys, or sleep

That folds your eyes and soothes your worried head,
Making you forget the need to have or to hold?
Then do you remember the crazy world of dreams
Or only the soft bed holding you quiet and still?

But perhaps there is a house you have been to,
Where you have lived for many years, or where
You have only stayed for a little, which holds
Something dear to your memory. Nothing is told

Among the mad and great events of history
Of these small memories, of your small loves
By which you grew taller or fell away
Back into the far past, unable to remember

Except with tears the beauty of your love,
Your love that now no longer is. We kiss

Among the rocky mountains and the valleys, going
Over each point of the loved landscape, and

It vanishes, and we can only sleep,
Or toss our miseries on tumultuous pillows.
Let us then examine the progress of
The years, in the light of our particular love.

What do you hold, what do you have ? It is
The least happy and best of elegies,
Seeing all history and your own life
Encompassed in a memory of grief.

But all is not so elegiac. We,
My darling, hold the point of history,
That may stick like a dagger in the breast,
Or may be—may it be ! all you can wish.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

THE MORE WE ARE TOGETHER

MERRIMENT mounts in the dry faces
Of a consolidated people.
The more we are together . . .
They join hands and sing,
And dance in a ring.

Yet this is a critical weather
And this is a critical time.
We philosophers watch
The stars in their conjunction
And smile, without compunction.

This star—this bright star—saith
Woe unto you, whose hearts are evil,
You who hold monotony in your hands
Like a charm against death,
You who sadly breathe.

The devil mounts in the dry faces
Of people whose merriment
Is a sacrilegious comment
On a gay time gone wrong,
When life is the only song.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

NOSTALGIA

MOURN not for this lone soldier's sake
Whose dust lies merged in Eastern sand
For every night in torrid sleep
His dreams were of his native land.
Now he has stirred from rest to wake
Upon a well-loved hill he knew
That he laid down his life to keep,
And there is nothing more to do.

All round him now the hills cry out
To greet him from the dusty plain;
The heathered ways he used to roam
He roams once more in wind and rain
For he is weary of the drought.
Mourn not I say . . . he has gone home.

CYNTHIA PALMER.

SOUTH WIND

THROUGH the timbers of the heavy cross
The South wind's carrying wave
Whispers the long-inward burning
Of a dying Christ—
Carrying, always carrying
The burden of the cry—
"Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabacthani."
Across the timber of taut souls
The wind still sweeps to-day,
Caressing the white bones
And the long bleached way
Of those learning and not learning, and
Fanning the burning of the green trees
And the dry.
Through grief, beyond grief—
To grief turned quiet
In undertow of understanding
Greater than robust joy,
The South wind blows.
Deep the sacrifice of the dawn's short hour,
Deep the sorrow of long sunset's fire,
Deep the sigh of the purifier—
Burning the green trees and the dry.

(*From Ezekiel 20, 47*). E. M. STEPHENSON.

SEA PINKS IN A CITY GARDEN

WHEN parched July has powdered down
Flaked dust upon the tired town,
A small smooth-bouldered rockery
Lures from the shade to comfort me
With touch of water-moulded stone,
And tufted sea thrift all full-blown.
I need but close my eyes to know
That on its home cliffs breezes blow,
Just as they did one summer day
Where tapered Five Points stretch away,
Dabbling long fingers in white spray,
From Clodgy Point to far Trevail.
To see close-clinging to the shale
On toughened root, the lance-like leaves
In round and tightly crowded sheaves,
Thrusting on upright stem each bloom,
Together massed a smouldering plume
Of flame, shell-petalled, peach and rose
The undulating colour flows.
Its own faint scent comes drifting near
And papery rustle on my ear
Sifts through the sound of traffic thick,
And by the soul's arithmetic
I bridge the arid miles between
This garden and that precious scene,
And go to walk beneath cool skies
To fill my hands and feast my eyes.

GLADYS HUNKIN.

SPRING AFTERNOON

GATHER the purple cuckoo song
in yellow globes of crocus wine:
the steel-shot wind is silent now
against the ribs of Time.

Turn, turn your head over Europe
where Death sits in the sun:
the bursting breath of the Lenten-lily
is little matter to him.

Gather the shadow primrose hymn
in simple cups of white:
but give, oh, give to the lover,
who will leave you in the night!

HOPE FOR 1944

IS this nightmare near its ending ?
Shall we wake and scan the skies
East and West with fearless eyes,
Welcome night that holds no terror ?
Comes that day with hands unbound
We will make the clarion sound,
Peace and good-will be its message.
Then the starving we can feed,
Then the prisoners be freed—
Lift from Jews their cruel burden.
On that happy longed-for day,
Free to live in their own way
Exiles will be turning homeward,
In their joy forget the pain
Never to occur again.
These are but the first of duties
When we make the clarion sound
Round this war-worn world and round.

ELIZABETH BARRETT.

A LONE STAR

A STAR forlorn has risen from thick darkness—
Illumine, star of mine, my mourning road !
'Tis not the straits of Sheol that torment me,
But life that wearies me—my days a load.
Loyal to the poor-house, at tramping an old hand,
Schooled to the yoke, to walk in need of bread ;
My father—bitter exile, my mother—want,
'Tis not my staff or the shameful scrip I dread !
More cruel than these, more bitter sevenfold
Is life without hope or brightness for the eyes ;
To sink as lead, drop deep within dark places,
A life sans hope, but of rot that putrefies ;
The life of a hungry dog, bound by its rope—
How art thou cursed, thou life without hope !
Illumine, star, my soul that has despaired
Through pagan worship and 'neath exile's weight,
Throw far thy beams, illumine the thick darkness—
I'm here to go, or I am here to wait . . .
Who knows how long again my night will be
What tramp and darkness God stores up for me—
And when I peer out from the dark I see
Thy staff of light—turn thou and comfort me.

To water my last flower of hope a clear
And crystal drop I guard—it is a tear.
Within my heart still glows an olden fire
Let it burst into flame ere it expire.
Ah! what is left of me throbs, with new life,
To fall in action, and to end in strife!

NINETEEN

(To V.M.)

THE months spin out their skies of grey and blue:
People and places neither laugh nor weep,
And there is only Silence half asleep
Among the may trees, white and thick with dew.
Nothing is altered in this grave routine,
Only, when Spring put out her hand to say
Goodbye to Summer in the usual way,
It seemed more final than it should have been.

This is to be the end of something rare,
Half understood; not-quite-grown-up Decembers
Are handed down to other children's care;
And yet you would not let my heart grow cold:
Let me remember as the pen remembers
When it preserves such things in words of gold.

MONICA PRITCHETT.

WILLOW

UNDER the green-winged willow,
The drifting light-limbed willow
My love and I did lie,
And grasses were our pillow
A fragrant living pillow
While winds across the sky

The low, white flocks were fleecing
In multitudes increasing
And water wandered by
To bind our thoughts unspoken
With links of gold unbroken
And bright birds darted by

And sang while we were silent—
What fulness to be silent—

In that sweet place we lay
And knew that earth was heaven
With love that we were given
Without a word to say.

Until the day was over—
A shadow came to cover
The brightness of your face.
O slowly falling willow
That piles my lonely pillow
Hide this forsaken place!

PHOEBE HESKETH.

MIRAGE

A CLOUD assumes a shape then hurries by
Changing as gusty breezes hasten on;
Ranging the farthest limits of the sky
Until, dissolving, every vestige gone,
Nothing remains to tell us of the form
That fled, precipitate, before the storm . . . . .

So life proceeds, launched naked in the stream
Of tense humanity that fights and strives,
Seeking to find salvation through the dream
That, phantom-like, lures futile fevered lives—
Eternal hope of happiness ahead,
Beyond the crest that calls the daily road.
And countless men have, sheep-like, thus been led
To bear the sweat and countenance the load.
Eyes fixed afar towards horizon's rim
Are blind to things so simple, close at hand;
Enticing hills are distant, grey and dim,
Around us there is beauty to command.

Its own intrinsic joy each day reveals,
Essential bliss that faithful insight feels!

ARTHUR LYNNFORD-SMITH.

THE HARBOUR

THERE is no death
In the morning.
The grey ships
Not fearing, float
Without motioning.

Sun tracks gilding
Pencils of space;
Lowered guns
Coldly shining, crouched
For night's red race.

Wars and furtiveness
Hidden in lightness;
The dark throats
Of funnels, starkly
Stretched stillness.

Dim lappings of time,
Driftings of green,
Pale oceans
And seaweed, blood,
The unseen.

ANTONY DE COURCY.

POETRY IS PLEASURE

IT is interesting to find among the countless theories and definitions of poetry the opinion of Edgar Allan Poe that the immediate object of a poem is pleasure. Much of his own verse might well be said to have attained this object, and we are surely agreed that such poetry as the sonnets of Shakespeare and the lyrics of the Lake Poets has provided a great amount of pleasure for all time. Poetry has passed through one or two phases, of course, since Poe conceived "The Raven," but there need be no reason why the worthy element of pleasure should exist in its scope "nevermore." Only recently T. S. Eliot stated reassuringly that poetry *has* to give pleasure, which would suggest that, notwithstanding the many changes that modernism has wrought, the object of poetry remains the same.

In order to derive pleasure from our reading we must first of all understand it, and the notoriously incomprehensible poetry of to-day, germinating probably in the last war and growing from obscurity to obscurity, does not contribute to the object in view. If we turn even to Edith Sitwell's "Façade" we find in this poem a collection of irrelevant images caught up in an energetic rhythm and presented as a dazzling sensation and nothing more ; in other words, no meaning is intended. There are, too, some modern poets who obviously reck not whether their work be understood or not and would lead us to believe that readers of their poems are actually not requested. Herbert Read prefaces his collected poems with the following quotation from Chapman : "Obscurity in affectation of words and indigested conceits is pedantical and childish ; but where it shroudeth itself in the heart of his subject, uttered with fitness of figure and expressive epithets, with that darkness will I still labour to be shadowed," but if this is meant to justify the obscurity of his own poetry it hardly applies. Read, like many other moderns, has certainly laboured to be shadowed in darkness, and this with some success, but so often it is a darkness far beyond fitness or necessity and achieving nothing but confusion and dismay in the most patient and perspicacious reader. This attitude is distinctly precious and selfish and can never further the interests of poetry. We are left to wonder what the object of such verse really is. If there is any reason for the obscurity little is apparent beyond simply a general deliberate desire to follow the fashion and be obscure ; or it may be that the business of being clever, the importance of piercing with unprecedented insight through the walls of the palpable world, has so occupied our modern "gods of love that tame the chaos" that commonplace clarity has no place in their minds. It seems the prize is to be won by him who loses himself in the furthermost labyrinthine regions wherein only the poet may enter, leaving the vulgar reader at the gates. Cunning, outvieing gymnastics such as these contribute largely to the versification of to-day, and all this under the simple heading of poetry, the object of which, it has been said, is pleasure.

If we are to get to the root of this polypus of obscurity perhaps we should begin with the Imagists, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington and others, about twenty-five years ago. The aim of the Imagists, in chiselling their hard-cut images, was clear and direct expression ; but such strict economy of presentation as these images demanded, eschewing the necessary expository element, must be either a hit or a miss. If the desired effect were created at the instant of impact, well and good, but often the reader is conscious only of a collection of staccato forms, like so many single counters, conveying on the whole very little. The efforts of the Symbolists also—according to Mallarmé, "to evoke an object in deliberate shadow, without ever actually mentioning it, by allusive words, never by direct words"—cannot but share the responsibility for much of this recondite writing. While commendable in their ambition to provide a means of expression for certain emotions and feelings that cannot be expressed in ordinary words, the Symbolists appear often to have realised

little more than the presentation to the reader of an uninviting pattern of hazy forms, showing neither synthesis nor sense. A further builder in the growth of obscurity is the Apocalypse School, introducing into the modern machine age the fairy-tale of days of yore ; and, of course, it is impossible to omit from the list Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism. But who is qualified to comment on this latter type of poetry ? Like Surrealist painting, it signifies nothing, except possibly to him who conceived it, and it is rather wonderful that such writing ever comes to be published. Do the publishers profess to understand it ? Certainly, any one sufficiently interested can avail himself of the several treatises on modern poetry and its methods, but it is necessary to make some considerable study of the subject before there is even a distant possibility of being able to appreciate it. And shall the ordinary reader, given the inclination (or curiosity) ever find time enough to pursue so great a study ? How much more convenient to pick up his well-thumbed *Golden Treasury !* It seems that whatever benefit that Surrealism, Symbolism and the rest, have on our poetry is nullified by their very definite contribution to incomprehension and the consequent banishment of anything related to pleasure.

In addition to facing such obstacles as these, there are many obscure subjects to be dealt with by the gentle reader. Unless his literary and scholastic background is equal to the poet's he is advised to have by him, in reading sometimes a single poem of no great length, books on Sculpture, Greek Mythology, Buddhism, Anthropology, the works of Dante, Freud and others, dictionaries of the foreign languages, ancient and modern, encyclopaedia and the Bible. Even then, the language is such that it is doubtful whether the full meaning can be apprehended. The Cantos of Ezra Pound (and here it is interesting to note that Pound has given a "Commission" to his songs that they "Go in a friendly manner, Go with an open speech") will never be understood, far less enjoyed, by the average reader. Indeed, the extreme pedantry and erudition (*sic !*) that Pound has infused into these works must surely prejudice the most learned against this type of poetry. He has shown a wilful disregard for the reader of less literary knowledge than himself, a contempt for the Philistines, which is not pleasant. Robert Southey, the Lake Poet, is reputed to have written much obscure and heavy poetry a hundred years ago ; his subjects were too far-fetched and were thus never popular. Yet any one at any time could turn to Southey's "Madoc" or "Thalaba the Destroyer" and readily grasp the theme and the whole substance. Southey's subjects may have been the obscurest ever, but he wrote with a perspicuity unequalled by any poet of to-day. "People talk of my style," he has said. "I have only endeavoured to write plain English and to put my thoughts into language which every one can understand." And unless, in the first place, the language is understandable, how can the subject be appreciated ? How, except in some way to the respective authors themselves, can pleasure enter ?

Let us look now at the technical side of modern poetry. Contemporaneity and up-to-date idiom have broken down the old formal style, loosening the metrical system, with experiments in free verse and popular song and dance measures. Amy Lowell, the American Imagist, declared that her cadence was built on "the rhythm of the speaking voice with its necessity for breathing, rather than upon a strict metrical system . . . constructed on mathematical and absolute laws of balance and time . . . The words must be hurried or delayed in reading to fill out the swing." Now, if all present poets were to adhere to these laws of balance and time, and all readers naturally fell into hurrying or delaying their reading as required, this new prosody would achieve something, for the loosening of rhyme and metre allow for greater freedom of thought and spontaneity ; but unfortunately, a great many poets seem to take a law

unto themselves so far as cadence is concerned and the patient reader may modulate his accents in a dozen different ways and yet find no true music in the poem. Certainly, Auden's ballad measures and some of Eliot's fast-flowing, swinging rhythms, are acceptable and pleasing; and there is evidence in Stephen Spender, and one or two others, of something that may be referred to as a sort of roundness, leaving in the reader a feeling of deep satisfaction. Lesser poets, however, have obviously regarded free verse as an additional element of elasticity in that which we have come to know as poetic licence and have used it merely as a convenience, an easy way out. It would seem that the loosening of formal styles, then, has led in many cases only to a loosening of poetical integrity. A form of rhythm determined by the instinct of the particular poet, whatever that may be, with the desultory use of antiphonals, assonance, and hints of rhyme here and there by way of decoration, appear to be all that can be referred to nowadays as the technique of poetry. It leads almost to a manhandling of the art in general and does not make for easy or pleasant reading.

It is interesting to compare our new poetry with the melody of Burns or the simple sweetness of Herrick. Who can refute the quick and lasting beauty of "My love is like a red, red rose" or "Fair daffodils, we weep to see you haste away so soon?" Here is true, spontaneous poetry unchecked by the influence of Marx or Freud. Nowadays we can detect little spontaneity, and "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." Again, what a marvellous philosophy lies in Shakespeare's perfect sonnet "O Mistress Mine," or Wordsworth's "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky!" This is clear, direct expression; this is the long-sought economy of utterance, and in a time when the accoutrements of Imagery, "the pagan speech of symbol" and the many geometrical devices of the moderns were not yet dreamt of. The meaning of these old poems leaps to the understanding, and their beauty, unless we are fit for stratagems and spoils, floods us with joy for ever. But what do we experience in lines such as these of J. F. Hendry from his "Picasso—for Guernica":

> Splint for the shriven sin I foster mantrump out
> Of festered history; sprout pointed fingers
> Where an afterbirth is dung and rubble-teat.
> I am the eyeball blown world! Axis of anger!—?

T. S. Eliot has said "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood," but it is hard to say in what way such "poetry" as this can communicate. If it affects the emotions at all it is to engender anger and exasperation. The melody of a great deal of our new poetry is not one that sings; and simple sweetness (painfully regarded as the "pretty-pretty") is evidently looked upon as a form of weakness much to be despised. Seldom do we find our senses lulled by the moderns, rarely, rarely are we transported to an april world of fantasy (unless it be one too far-fetched and incomprehensible for us to appreciate); if any kind of beauty is intended it is usually overshadowed by such a mass of metaphysical drapery that it is completely lost to view. We do not sit down by the fire in comfort to dream with the modern poet—we lay the book on our desk, produce paper and pencil and commence to work out an intricate problem by algebra—if we think it worth our trouble.

Fortunately, however, this bewildering modern mood, though widely spread, has not discoloured all of our new poetry. Herbert Palmer, for example, is a relief to read for his staunch traditional style; and it is encouraging to find in Ruth Pitter a pure poetry reminiscent of the delightful writings of Alice Meynell. Certain of the lesser-known poets, whose work is perhaps not "clever" enough to have been infected with this fever of profundity and metrical extremes, remaining bright-eyed, young and

healthy, shows much promise for a good, clear, modern verse. These new poets are often worth reading for it is interesting to follow the trend of modern thought when actually revealed to us. A large proportion of the verse in *Poems of this War*, published not long ago by the Cambridge University Press, includes the work of some comparatively unknown, young writers, and such poetry, singing the praises of the British Navy in a fresh and fast tempo, at a time when Drake has long since left his hammock, is thrilling and very pleasant to read.

Perhaps, also, if we open Spender's *Still Centre* or *Ruins and Visions* we shall come nearer to the object of pleasure. In Spender there is little of the usual tortuousness. His deep, sensual understanding combines with a clear, matter-of-fact expression in the contemporary idiom to form a highly satisfactory modern verse. By lesser poets than himself he has been accused of "over-prettiness," probably because his poetry often appeals more to the emotions than to the intellect, but surely the first direction of any of the arts should be to the emotions. Spender is essentially lyrical and much of his poetry rises to emotional heights reached by Shelley. It is often pleasant also to read the side of Auden which remains untainted by his elliptic element. His syncopated rhythms may not always escape doggerel, but his boyishness, his humour, and the dignity which often accompanies his lightest and most popular verse, are very desirable. The lyricism of Day Lewis, seeking for a certain clarity, can provide some pleasure; and Louis Macneice has written a considerable amount of attractive verse, such as "Birmingham," where his classical forms have not enshrouded his quick, modern eye. If the work of these latter poets were sifted of its quantity of profundity it would no doubt form a nucleus of excellent modern poetry, freed from the esoteric rings swung around it by Pound and others and set on the path to popularity.

Modern methods are commendable from many points of view; and, of course, new thought is new life. The urge for direct expression, the use of familiar and domestic terms in everyday life, the disintegration of the heavily embroidered fabrics of the Tennysonians—all these must collaborate in producing a new verse acceptable to the majority of people in the modern era; but the mass of cerebral and recondite matter that clogs so much of our new verse, far from being an improvement, must only add to the isolation of poetry in general. It must be borne in mind, of course, that this is but a period of transition, without which no worthy and stable poetry could ever materialise, and it is gratifying to notice some slight promise that, with the gradual return in some parts to Romanticism and to simplicity, the worst of these crippling enigma variations will be eliminated in the not too distant future. When this comes to pass there is no doubt that the interest in poetry, which has been slowly growing within the last decade, will show a vast increase. Poetry must be brought to the masses, and there is every likelihood that it will be as soon as it can be readily appreciated by them and can provide enough pleasure to attract them.

MARION MACKELLAR.

THE SOLITUDE OF WAR

THE solitude of War is present now
(The wideness of our parting underlines
An evening's gentleness, the mind's unrest)
Battle is here and love is far removed
While jagged rain around the siren falls.

JAMES R. STANNAGE.

WHY HILAIRE BELLOC WILL LIVE

FASHION in the appreciation of poetry is as affected and apprehensive as it commonly is in other departments of taste; the biggest fear of its devotees is of not being up to the minute. A poet who has passed middle age and continues to write must be suspect; if he was esteemed by the Edwardians and produced much of his best work in their time, sneers and lip-curling are to be expected; when it is seen that he found his subjects for poetry just where the accepted masters of English song found theirs—in joy and beauty, love and faith—why, the man is almost unspeakable already. But to Hilaire Belloc more monstrous offences still are chargeable. He has written lines and whole verses as pellucid as tarn water, and so of no possible interest to those who enjoy only analysing muddy ditches. He reverences form and the simple statement. His images do not shock or startle at first acquaintance. Faults of omission, finally, put him beyond the pale. He fails to paint a halo round every proletarian brow, misses the poetry in toe-nail parings and pneumatic drills, and utterly forgets to derive the common emotions of humanity from frustrated sexual passion at the age of six. How could he be valuable or attractive to those who inaugurate, manipulate, ensue, interpret, or otherwise constitute fashion?

This is a truculent opening, but I have not been briefed for defence. Hilaire Belloc has never been himself a defensive writer and would not expect an enthusiast for his poetry to take such a line. It is unlikely, however, that his advocate can make out a case to satisfy every member of a jury. Only those who insist upon form in art can be receptive to the messages of Hilaire Belloc. For the folk who do not enjoy in poetry shapely patterns, in music the perfection of fugue, in portraiture fidelity to line, I can only advise them to part from me amicably now without more ado. I have no wish to preach to the inconvertible.

Hilaire Belloc, then, is concerned, as any real poet must be, with beauty and truth and experience, and with their points of reconciliation. Now it is commonly assumed, in assessment of artists at the present time, that the greatest illumination is thrown on those questions when the artist has put the whole of himself into his work; not his effort or his understanding, but his very self. The argument will hold on two conditions, that there are outstanding genius and a flawless devotion to order in addition to this bequest of the whole self. When all these qualities are present there can spring up supreme masterpieces; the result is a Rabbi Ben Ezra, a Childe Harold, a Brahms piano concerto. Shade down the requirements by never so little and you get a Lionel Johnson or a Schumann, someone lovable to all who are by nature sympathetic, but lacking in universal appeal because some will always find the artist's character repellent. As an all-round generalisation merely, it seems safer to argue that the inner circle of genius is made up of those whose work exhibits exactly nothing of themselves. What do we know of Shakespeare from the plays of Shakespeare? That he knew everything about humanity, yes; but not whether he gained that knowledge by suffering or study, observation or inspired guesswork; rather he seems to have known the world by intuition, Pope remarked. What kind of person wrote the last chapters of Isaiah? The music of Bach tells us nothing about Bach. From their productions we can infer practically nothing of Rembrandt and less of Velazquez. Perhaps the greatest tribute of all is to say that a work of art stands absolute, apart from its creator, and yet could not have been conceived by any one else.

It is on the slopes leading to these summits that the best of Hilaire Belloc's poetry will ultimately rest. These lines are absolute poetry and nobody else could have written them:

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Of which you are the daughter and the heir.
For as you pass, the natural life of things
Proclaims the Resurrection: as you pass
Remembered summer shines across the grass
And somewhat in me of the immortal sings.

More than somewhat, would be my comment. Then there is the loveliest epitaph in our language, which ends with the couplet:

Sleep your fill—but when you wake
Dawn shall over Lethe break.

Yet there may be a clue to some guiding belief of the most objective creator. It is safe to assume that Shakespeare believed there was good in all men, Bach in an almighty God, Rembrandt that age might know and be serene. If there is any one word to sum up the quality of Hilaire Belloc's verse, that word is spiritual. The waters of faith lap constantly against the rocks of experience. Immortality borders all our transient minutes. Acceptance, therefore, is not enough without adoration as well. He sees the higher significances everywhere. The dedication of *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts* begins

Child! do not throw this book about!
Refrain from the unholy pleasure
Of cutting all the pictures out!

goes on to describe the child's hands tearing the pages or shaking "the Massive Paws of Elder Persons," then gently and suddenly ends

And when your prayers complete the day,
Darling, your little tiny hands
Were also made, I think, to pray
For men that lose their fairylands.

The essential meaning of a gesture is conveyed again in "A Bivouac":

You came without a human sound,
You came and brought my soul to me;
I only woke, and all around
They slumbered on the firelit ground
Beside the guns in Burgundy.

I felt the gesture of your hands,
You signed my forehead with the Cross;
The gesture of your holy hands
Was bounteous—like the misty lands
Along the Hills in Calvados.

And again, more ruefully, in "Down Channel":

There will be no meeting of eyes, nor any blessing,
After the run.
The lips are still and the hand has ceased from caressing.
There is nothing more to be done.

Love, which is the theme of many of the sonnets—by the way, the odd-numbered sonnets are usually superior to the others—is often approached through reverence and mystery, either directly, as in

Because I find foreknowledge in my soul
Of your true sisterhood with heavenly things,
And see from tardier years that further goal
Youth hides from you with its imaginings

or symbolically, as in

The holy mist, the white mist of the morning,
Was wreathing upward on my lonely way.
The way was waiting for your own adorning
That should complete the broad adornèd day.

At times a truly Shakespearean cadence is sounded, the level lines, word-plays, rhyme-scheme, all evident, as in this sestet :

I am acquainted with misfortune's fortune,
And better than herself her dowry know :
For she that is my fortune and misfortune,
Making me hapless, makes me happier so :
In which conceit, as older men may prove,
Lies manifest the very core of Love.

Love is a unifying of reason, desire and dedication ; love, whether of God, of women, of friends, of places, or of ideas—"love permanent with the wild hedgerows"—is presented in bright or dimmed colours as experience is brought into its beams.

But no one could expect the author of such a book as *The Path to Rome,* in which personality strides over every page, to keep himself and his predilections out of all his verse ; and in a number of short pieces Hilaire Belloc does show himself to be in the royal descent of English lyric-writers, those who have distilled into a moment's mould some memory or strong feeling or pleasure, or some comment on a human emotion as old as the sand, but now expressed in a new way. That he loves Roman traditions, order, dignity, loyalty, medieval architecture, Oxford, Sussex, France, great landscape anywhere, towns, rivers, sailing and the sea, wine, theological argument, the conversation of wise men ; that he hates professors, politicians, publicists, Puritans, psychologists, plutocrats and pacifists ; that he stands by those older values rooted in historic depth and is in revolt against the present world's commercial and empirical measurements : all that is apparent in his work.

Almighty God will surely cry,
"St. Michael ! Who is this that stands
With Ireland in his dubious eye,
And Perigord between his hands,

And on his arm the stirrup-thongs,
And in his gait the narrow seas,
And in his mouth Burgundian songs,
But in his heart the Pyrenees ?"

The "Dedicatory Ode" is an extraordinary mixture of foolery and rare flashes of beauty and truth, with one of the most famous of modern verses :

From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.

Reading that in public once, I sensed the audience draw in its breath at those lines so unexpected in their context, and it was necessary to make a long pause.

There should be mention also of the uproarious comedy of the stanzas about animals, the parody of a Newdigate prizewinner, drinking songs from *The Four Men,* a whole sheaf of ballads, and those epigrams, sometimes tender, but more often blown upon by the north wind of his ire, as in these lines on a Puritan :

He served his God so faithfully and well
That now he sees him face to face, in hell.

Yet the volume of Hilaire Belloc's output is small for a major poet.

In days when so many poets seem scared of remaining outside "schools," and critics tend to ignore them if they do, it is right to remember that we have in Hilaire Belloc one who invigorates by his individuality, yet never loses contact with the founders of his craft. He is at once classic and fresh. The Elizabethans would have understood his patterns and imagery, yet Rupert Brooke considered him a master for his own time. Out of sympathy with his century, he offers not despair, but a set of positive values. In him the best elements of Stoic and Epicurean are fused. He can sing, shout, detonate, whisper, caress and worship. Of his prose, A. G. Macdonell wrote: "No one, so far as I know, has ever had the nerve to think he could play as Mr. Belloc does on all the instruments of the great orchestra"; but goes on beyond this to assert that "it is as a poet that he touches the Pleiades." Perhaps when the wheel of fashion spins again, and we are no longer awestruck but simply bored by the purveyors of plangent railings and queasy cod-sperm, we shall be able once more to understand the mind and hear the voice which can declaim:

What are the names for Beauty? Who shall praise
God's pledge he can fulfil His creatures' eyes?
Or what strong words of what creative phrase
Determine Beauty's title in the skies?
But I will call you Beauty Personate,
Ambassadorial Beauty, and again
Beauty triumphant, Beauty in the Gate,
Beauty salvation of the souls of men.

ALAN PHILLIPS.

AFTER MANY DAYS

FIVE times five summers have foamed into blossom
An sunk back in crimson and brown to the grave,
Since Lesbos, held warm on the soft breathing bosom
Of age-drowsed AEgean, was kissed by my wave.
Lesbos, green cradle of Sappho, whose singing,
Echoing faint from the sheer cliffs of Time,
Still sets the strings of a wild heart ringing
To her rhyme.

A whole generation of winters have slumbered,
Mourned through the Spring by the violets they bare,
Since I saw over Athens, like lilies unnumbered,
Dead gods' pale palaces hang in the air.
If the dead be dust, shall the dust not see us?
Dust ghosts watching where dead feet trod:
I moved with a ghost, from the walled Piraeus—
Of a god.

He proffered a seed, which I swallowed unthinking:
The years curled down from the distaff of Fate,
And, Hellas forgot, I went drifting and drinking
Down summers of loving and winters of hate.
But my ghost-god patiently hoed his sowing;
Where Youth lies rotting and fat weeds throng—
Till my hard clay cracked to the eager growing
Of a song.

FRANK BATCHELOR.

TO ONE DEAD

(On an Anniversary)

COME like the fine-cut slip of the new moon
Carded white may-cloud, spray blown and lost again
Visit the embers before they are wind strewn
—Loveliest lady!

Let the eye see you, inner eye, stronger eye
Watch as you sit by the fire new springing,
See your hands swift as the needles they deftly ply
Patiently knitting.

Let the ear hear you, ear that remembers,
How you would say with reproof low and loving
—Blow, wind of memory, waking these embers—
"Spending your money!"

Watch me in turn, see how the years drop
Leaf upon leaf, flake upon brown flake:
Sorrow of years matures but a waste crop,
Fungus and lichen.

What will you see in thicket and clearing,
See with the eye that is keener than mortal,
Beauty in seed but so late in appearing,
Dragons and angels?

Will you perhaps think the long years were wasted
Years you so patiently taught by example?
Too little building, too much life tasted,
Little digested?

I unconcealing will spread out before you
Sorrel and sunflower, bindweed and heather,
Winter must bury the petals and rain strew
Sorrow upon them.

Snow spreads its petals light on the grasses
Where your earth lies and stays not the sunlight;
Blossom with day and die when it passes,
Beauty and sorrow.

Die in a day, leave us their seed strewn
Beauty the berry and spine of the holly
Sorrow the bells and in winter the full moon
Over the belfry.

In a world sorrowful one who remembers
Holds you a moment away from the hill-top
Calls you from asphodel down to these embers,
Stay but a moment!

Stay but a moment, smile on me once again
Lay your snow foliage light on my failures
Smile, that to-morrow's green bud may yet attain
Yesterday's promise.

We who are living under the moon and sun
Are no less fragile of substance than you are—
Pray but a prayer for us while the sands softly run
Still through the hour-glass!

T. W. Ramsey.

PORTRAIT

THAT he was born some fifty years ago,
Married, had children, made something of a mark
Behind a desk and in the counsels of men,
So much I know:
It is written, concise, unilluminating, in the books
Of reference, with some trivial particulars
Of where he lives and clubs and what he plays.
And for his looks
You would not search in vain newspaper files
In sundry places. You would see the usual
Greying locks and bald head and keen eyes
And ready smiles.
But I have seen him as an artist did
Many, many years ago when in his teens,
Just a boy in a kilt; clearly one who acted
As he was bid,
Gentle, not strong-minded, cheerful, open-hearted;
One who would seem to thrive on kindness, yet be better
When a sharp mother's tongue scourged him, or at school
Hot censure darted
From master's mouth. If in the course of time
These things taught service, and how to learn
From greater minds (though maybe not so shrewd)
The art to climb
And (with some fortune doubtless) make his mark,
I wondered what sort of man he would be then.
Confident? Brutal? Cheerful? A friend of all?
Or would some dark
Secretive instinct, born of inhibitions
And the knowledge of his own inner weakness,
Burn out his soul, drag down with false logic
His intuitions,
Turn his capacity for love into the gleam
And froth of shallow waterways—full of praise
For God and man and woman, while all the time
Self was his only true and constant theme?

Such thoughts were bred, not as I looked at him,
Hanging there on the wall, full length, in the noon sun,
But when, at nightfall, soul from shadows peeped,
And all youth's lines were dim.

Patrick Ramsay Laird.

LAMENT

I HAVE listened to good music this night
But my heart is not at peace
I have tried to be contented in the firelight
But my trouble will not cease.
I have read an old-time tale
It is all of no avail;
I would see an end of strife
I would rest.
Were there nothing beyond life
That were best:
No hope, no gate there,
Nor love nor hate there,
No one to wait there.

I would I had no friend to grieve for me
No light to call me to eternity,
That I were as one sunken in the sea
Rotten,
Forgotten!
I would that past that shut and final gate
Nothing might lie in wait
No life, no spark
That might survive the dark, dark, dark!

Oh! Dark night cover
Me from my lover
Deep over for ever.
Oh! Light that begot me
I would you forgot me
I would you might cover me,
Me and my memory
For ever and ever.

E. E. O. Mullins.

JEANIE

WHITE as foam on crested wave
My Jeanie is to me,
Rowan-red her bonny mouth
And fair her company.

When Jeanie on the sithern* sits,
She to the world is dead;
The green moss grows about her feet,
Wild berries crown her head.

She sings the songs the fairies sing;
Their secrets they impart
To Jeanie when she meets them there
With listening ear and heart.

They teach her how the honey flows
From heather-bells at noon,
And why soft clouds of silver mist
Enshrine the lady moon.

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They teach her how the honey flows
From heather-bells at noon,
And why soft clouds of silver mist
Enshrine the lady moon.

They teach her why the world is gay,
And why the world is drear ;
They show her of the things to be,
And things of yesteryear.

They teach her love and courtesy,
The tranquil, tender ways
Of moonbeams lighting lonely ships
In little shadowy bays . . . .

When Jeanie down the sithern comes
With rowans in her hand,
I'll whisper all my love, and know
Her love will understand.

*fairy hill.

MARY WINTER WERE.

ELEGIAC TO AUBADE

O HALF-FORGOTTEN bird, I have not heard you
Since the shrill siren chilled our island night.
Didst slip this year through the green leafways viewless,
Too wild, too wanderer, to brook such warning,
Offence to spring and heaven come to earth ?
Can nightingales have heard it and sung on,
Deep in the Warwick woods and Hertford lanes ?
Surely the company of heaven is troubled
Down to its slightest wing by the hawk's shadow.
I am so weary of this dodging death :
I hear Death march or crawl across the sky,
Close overhead, closer than last night's thunder,
Crouched listening, elbows braced upon the footstool
On which a small child sat a life ago
Under the piano in the blue-walled drawing-room,
Listening to hymns in Sunday evening sunset.
My heart grows bitter for those unknown English,
Uncounted, unaccountable, unavenged,
Blotted unnoticed from their east coast village,
Five—six—too few for anger or dismay,
For Whitehall or broadcasting explanation ;
Beads dropped unnoted from the nation's string,
Brown faces missed above the evening hedge,
From the small garden's summer sun and salt,
From the dwindling treasury of English life.
At least, at last, we can face our ancestors,
Bowmen and Ironsides, Sidney and Wellington !
They never fought an enemy overhead,
Lived days beneath the shadow of the hawk ;
But these—what spirits fly about the prows
Of Spitfires rushing to the pounce ! what laughter,
Deep spirit laughter at these latest born
Riding the air to meet and shock Apollyon.

REDCLIFFE MCKIE.

THE TRAVELLERS (TO L.M.L.)

SO far we have travelled apart, but circumstance
Brings us together. Here we stand,
In the midst of conflict, by a stream
Rippled with moonlight, peaceful as a dream,
As evening in a windless land.

Here we stand together, yet alone—your thoughts
Soaring where mine may never go—
Mine plunging down to the still deeps
Nor moon nor sun may penetrate, where sleeps
All thought and colour and time, below

Which are the Eternal hands outspread for ever, hands
Whose span reaches through earth to sky
Touching your dreams . . . A noble thought,
Born in such time, may never, never be caught
In word or melody. We cry

To be fulfilled. Fulfilment is not hidden there,
Nor may we know achievement here
On earth. We live and concentrate
On what we count important, grow and mate,
And sing a little, love and fear,

Hate, grow idle, work, and afterwards forget
All that we loved as day to day
Passes. The folly of growing old
Too young we know—the error of growing cold
Because love hurt us on our way.

But now we come together, under the moon we wait
Silently—joy growing strong
Within us, while the moon and white
Planets search the corners of the night.
This is the beginning of our song.

Pte., A.T.S. MARGERY SMITH.

AFTERMATH

AS to its close declines the autumn day
the vanquished sun strives vainly to resist
the slow invasion of the creeping mist
o'er valley fields where quiet waters stray—
mist that shuts colour out and leaves but gray,
till evening, trailing veils of amethyst
evokes enchantments, like an alchemist—
colour revives, turns gold, and fades away.

So our first death, the end of time, shall weave
its own enchantments. Some new sense may see
ere this life's warm delights have vanished quite
(to cheer our journey through a cheerless night)
within a quiet space, like this calm eve,
the iridescence of eternity.

W. H. DENNETT-MORGAN.

HUNTER'S FOAL

HIS mother's harmonies predestined him
Apollo out of Leto :
He is all prelude yet
Delightfully uncertain,
The pupil's opening bars
An unresolved arias . . .

Behold him scampering in the breeze
Suddenly hinting melody
Waking a crescendo of quavers
Upon his artless breve ;

Soon he will quicken tempo
Till all his rhyme unleash
(Beneath some persuasive-fingered rein)
The beauty of his sire his dame
Into what rippling notes of flesh
And O what lyrical delight !

Roused to his rhythm's fullest height
And orchestrated overtone
He will outrange the reach of mind
In an ecstacy of action,

He will loose such a sensuous poetry
As shall enthrall the heavenly Nine
Their own pure dream of curve and line
And delicate symmetry . . . .

Some golden autumn morn
The huntsman's trembling horn
Shall hail him nobly born.

SYDNEY RIDGWAY.

IN COVENTRY

IN COVENTRY, a daffodil
Nods gently by a broken sill,
A child swings on a broken gate,
And everything seems now too late.
But, hark, hope rides upon the hill
And angels pierce earth's fogs, to fill
Gethsemene with Easter, still !
Ah, love and beauty are innate
IN COVENTRY.

Here, overseas, we wake a thrill
To know such greatness there, until
We rise, and can no longer wait
To prove our faith inviolate ;
We'll work with you our Maker's will
IN COVENTRY.

Asheville, N.C.

H. T. DOUGLAS ROBINSON.

FROM THE CLEAVE

THE blue gauze of the day lies undulating
Under autumnal sun ;
Faint from the steeple of Manaton
Drift one by one.

The quiet tones telling of Time,
Each transient note
Swathed in blue gauze, borne hesitant over the valley,
Vibrant, remote.

Returning jackdaws man the sun-warmed rocks,
Rook clans clatter and clack :
Black motes floating high in the fluid gold
Of the sun's widening wrack.

Mortal with shadow the moor ; the grey waves mounting
Over the aureoled trees
Till only eternity lingers,
Only eternity sees.

BRENDA F. SKENE.

VISION

"Twenty-two of our aircraft are missing"—18-1-43

SHALL they as meteor
Into unlit forgottenness descend
Unmarked unwondered from this second night ?

Shall we who watched from far
Their young all-swift magnificence attend
Our little lives unchanged by their lost light ?

Lest their unmeasured are
Our second blindness, unrestored, condemn,
Shatter our eyes, dear God, but give us sight.

MARY SAVIDGE.

WINTER AGAIN

THERE will be Winter again, and all the clean cool things,
Snowdrops ; and snow itself ; and the first clear thrush that sings ;
And new-born shivering lambs that bleat bewilderment ;
A dank, still evening mist, and raindrops' murmurings,
And naked trees clean-limbed when the leaf fall is ended ;
Wounds that have ceased to foster, and broken dreams new mended.

There will be winter again, dispassionate, austere,
The fever-heat allayed, the water of Life run clear ;
Pale sharp frosty sun ashine on the glittering tide,
Dim spiders' webs in the nooks where summer's ribbons were,
And silver willow-buds the approach of spring confessing.
Night will be dark, with stars, and the moon will be a blessing.

D. E. CHRISTINE TOMLIN.

THE PREMIUM EDITOR'S REPORT

AGAIN a large number of entries have been sent in for the premium, but the honours list will not reflect this fact. In entry after entry it seemed too apparent that the service of the Muse was taken too easily, that all might be left to an urge or even maybe an inspiration and nothing offered on the altar of sheer hard work. There are too many aspirants who have never subjected themselves to the stern discipline that is the first noviciate of the poet and have consequently not developed that technical art which conceals and yet reveals art. Even grammar is lax, one competitor "lays in the arms of rhythm," though what, except a convenient rhyme, does not appear. Rhythm is almost a lost art or at best a fading one. So long as the syllables are present in the correct number few people care whether the stresses and accentuations are suitable. This is necessary for poetry whatever one may say of rhyme. In the latter one time respected attribute of poetry most competitors were lax. They might start out well, but soon grew tired and shirked—a sure sign of an incomplete and insufficient appreciation of poetic integrity.

It is not the case that anything will do for a poem. Rhythm is essential and many entries would not qualify even for good prose, which also needs rhythm. It is surely hopeless to expect ever to write good poetry until the aspirant has mastered the first and basic requirements of the art, rhythm and rhyme, both of which teach that beautiful compression which makes poetry at once more significant and more musical than prose and give it its sole reason for existence.

It is not as though the poetic content of the entries is in any way remarkable or more than one meets in any decent prose. It is too often overlooked or ignored that poetic inspiration and imagery are never absent from good prose, indeed, they are often present in a measure that no poet would scorn. It is the latter's task to weld these things into a more difficult idiom without obscurity and with as much music as he can command.

The award on this occasion is divided between CYNTHIA PALMER (York), who submitted three poems all good, all technically beautiful, and ARTHUR LYNFORD-SMITH (Wanstead), who sent one of those thoughtful poems which, because of their sincerity and simple beauty, stay in the memory.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

T. E. Casson, Pennington ; Mary Mair, Epsom ;
Dulcie Eden Greville, Wakefield ; Diana Momber, Devenport.

COMMENDED

Alice E. Collinge, Bolton ; Phoebe Rayner, Bolton.
A. Edward Farmer, S.W.17. Mary Savidge, Bradfield St. George ;
Redcliffe McKie, Brighton ; Harry Sefton, Lytham ;
Joyce M. Lloyd, Hassocks ; W. T. Shorthose ;
Irene H. Moody, Vancouver ; Kate Toovey, Amersham.

The usual premium offer for the best poem or poems submitted to the Premium Editor during the month (without limitation of subject) is continued. Not more than four lyrics or one long poem should be submitted. MSS. should reach "The Premium Editor, THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," by February 12th, accompanied by stamped addressed envelope, and if criticism is desired, 2s. 6d. (For a more detailed postal criticism, 5s. should be sent.) It is essential that entrants to this competition be members of The Poetry Society or registered subscribers to THE POETRY REVIEW, and that each poem bears the name and address of the author. (Entries received after the formal closing date are carried forward to the next adjudication.

Leander Leitner is an artist and patron of the arts—is a poet and patron of poets—and old friend of THE POETRY REVIEW. His books have been reviewed therein. His new volume, *From Heart and Hand* (Skylines Press, Wilmington), is a charming little book with fine woodcuts by the artist himself, accompanied by his easy-flowing mode, touching things quite deeply. One entitled "Majesty" follows :

All life
Is energy,
That spends its sacred urge,
As luxury of light is stressed
In flame.

The years have done much to enrich Leitner's expression. He writes me : "An artist looking to poetry for his inspiration and the musician and dramatist doing likewise, poetry becomes the major art of the arts, with fulfilment in the finer aims of life an accomplishment."

The Poet Laureate of Texas gives us a volume of poems promising a brighter dawn, may it be so.

We have reviewed Mrs. Crowell so lately that we will not write at length here and now about her—but will read the poem which gives the title to the book, *Some Brighter Dawn* by Grace Noll Crowell (Harper and Brothers, New York and London).

Out of this dark will come some brighter dawn.
Face Eastward, O my comrades, and move on ;
Face toward the hills where the first gleam of light
Will pierce the pall of this strange lengthened night,
Where there will burst a sudden glorious flower.
Move forward, Hearts, perhaps this very hour,
Sooner than we think, it may be here :
The dawning of a day that will be clear,
With the roadway straight and shining at our feet.
Rise up with faith and courage now to meet
The dawn—that brighter dawn where light will run
To meet all those who journey toward the sun.

Texas is a veritable empire in area and influence, and is fortunate to have so excellent a Poet Laureate.

Milford Shields was born in Iowa, moving to Western Colorado at an early age and he has made his home there since. An ardent lover of poetry he celebrates Colorado in his first book, *Colorado* (Bruce Humphries, Boston).

In a recent letter, Mr. Shields tells us that to him "poetry is a celestial radiance, and is troubled at seeing the men in poets contend for any particular school or modulation." Glancing through the pages, we have chosen Colorado as being a good example of the talent of this writer :

A sturdy brotherhood of pioneers
Marked out this region in the virgin West ;
They carved and wrought through vigor of the years
A commonwealth as mighty as the rest,
A granite stone in rampart of the free.

They forged four freedoms into four-square state :
No want nor fear were left to measure by,
Men's thoughts and heart throbs were the glories great
To flame on mountain-altars to the sky,
A flowing faith unto Infinity.

Through ringing march of years our state has come
Into the greater heritage of time ;
It is a vital unit in the sum
Of man's vast effort toward estate sublime,
A rock in ramparts of humanity.

Such is the virtue of our heritage,
And we rise up to this exalted right—
Our sweat and blood will help to write the page
Of victory in world's immortal fight.
This, Colorado, is thy destiny.

Forty-five pages containing war songs by Struthers Burt has just been sent us from Scribner's. One wonders which of the war songs herein may be set to thrilling march time and become known like the "Long, Long Trail" by Zo Eliot. Will it be "In a Time Unwished For ?

Long lean rifle hidden from the sun—
By the long lean rifle this country was won ;
By lean men, ragged men, men who read the signs :
The broken leaf, the turned twig, the track the dust outlines.
By poor men, ragged men, this country was won,
And by the long lean rifle hidden from the sun.

No longer now for a great while will be gentleness,
Nor ready kindness, treasurable and bright,
No longer now by dusk is quiet laughter
Before the dark contentment of the night ;
Now from uneasy anger sleepers waken
To meet the blinding anger of the light.

O Great Republic, look with level eyes,
Nor heed the irresolute dividing voice ;
With your tall height the guarding of the skies
Is yours, in this decision not your choice.

O Great Republic, arm and strike, and then
Some day the world can search for truth again.

By the long lean rifle hidden from the sun,
By the long lean rifle this country was won.

Kate Renner Archer gives us in *Recurrent Vigil* (Gillick Press, Berkeley, California) poignant poems concerning the war—which she learned to know through two wars as bride and mother all its terrible anxieties. We read of this in a graphic picture in her opening poem :

Twice for the cause of war I have kept vigil
Once as a bride, beside a new-made fire,
Hearing the shining gift-clock on the mantel—
Ticking towards the death-hour of desire
Ticking . . . oh busy heels on Time's cold causeway . . .
Life into death and battle, blood and mire.

Twice for the cause of war I have kept vigil.
Now as the mother of a son, I sit
Hearing the ageing timepiece on the mantel—
Ticking above the fire I have kept lit—

Ticking youth on from peace to war's dread altar ;
How long, O Lord, till mankind turn from it ?

Here is a poet who knows his subject—thoroughly at home on the waters of Chesapeake Bay—sailing them daily. *These Chesapeake Men* (Driftwood Press, North Montpelier, Vermont) is Gilbert Byron's first gathering in book form. It appears that the dwelling by mighty rivers, or great waters, is enlarging to the mind. Think of how many of our outstanding men through the years have dwelt by the rivers—and, of course, the ocean must remain always a great source of inspiration.

Mr. Byron writes us he is of English stock. A sentence from his letter tells us the following :

"About poetry, I cannot tell you what it is, the fish-hawk, though, knows when he has caught his fish, even if he cannot define it. Likewise, I know when I have written a real poem, and usually it is something as spontaneous as the hawk's dive."

Let us take "Sails" :

Blue satin bay,
And large white schooner
Sailing wing and wing ;
The book's half open
And a salty page or two
Is full of wind.

Blue satin bay,
And raking masted bug-eye,
Beating into the southerly ;
Huge triangles flat,
White moths fluttering.

Blue satin bay
Skipjacks dredging an oyster bed,
A broad reach to Poplar Island,
Some old white herons,
Skimming along toward home.

The book is pleasingly illustrated with many colour sketches by Jack Lewis, and Mr. Byron's verses sing themselves into the memory.

Rebecca Maria Bennett desires to disclose to us—within the pages of her first book, *The Great White Bird* (Arembee Press, Indianapolis)—"the story of life upon earth and its progress toward the ideal," a towering subject.

We will list the names of the poems to give the sequence : Creation, Dawn, Storm at Daybreak, Bright Morning, Dark Moon, West with the Sun and Into the Night. And of this sequence we give the first :

Out of the ooze and slime of prehistoric time,
When the earth was new from the sun,
And hot mists enveloped all things undeveloped
In steaming dark, Life was begun ;
As there spoke in thunder, penetrating under
The suffocating cloak of night
To the insensate mass steeping in fuming gas,
A Voice saying : "Let there be light !"

"Let there be space and light, and let creatures have sight.
Let there be Life upon the earth !"
And lumpish clay felt urge to move and upward surge.
Vine, tree and water-spring had birth.
Volcanoes belched and seared the air and land appeared,
Born of fire and rock ; while in storm
All things swayed and trembled, like and like assembled
To bring from chaos shape and form.

In this poem we see a marked ability to deal with the profound.

Highly honoured was Robert Kimberly in 1938 by the beloved Bard who spoke of him in thiswise—"I look on him as a real poet : as that he is a priceless discovery . . . If he pushes on from his present ground of achievement, he is destined to make an impression on his era." *Through The Perilous Night* (Christopher Publishing House, Boston, Mass.) is Kimberly's first collection in book form, although his poems are quite widely known. "Sad Vista" is a veritable song :

The autumn roses scatter
On broken shards and fountains,
Where guns of terror shatter
These reverberating mountains.

A forsaken peacock flutters
Below a fallen willow,
The barbaric shriek he utters
Floods with red an emerald pillow.

In blue mist of torn hedges
With shell-bent flute awry,
Pan lisps old love-lorn pledges
While two bleeding soldiers die.

Chaotic, sad, unfriended,
Stares the mansion, lost,
By druid stars attended
And the moon, a silver ghost !

Inspiring and musical is "Time, We Have Banners !"

Time, we have banners,
Lift them, proud and flowing—
Flaunt them by the margents
Raise them on the glowing
Last ramparts of the World !
Time we have banners
Let them be unfurled !

Where in tense battle
Reverent men have stood,
Dreams now dissolve
In starry seas of blood—
Though Freedom's cause be slain,
Time, we have banners—
Let them not fall in vain !

Helen Parry Eden, widely appreciated in England, tells us of herself, her occupation, her environment, in *Poems and Verses.* We are glad that the Bruce Publishing Co. gives us this opportunity to enjoy her work. Miss Eden has a number of books to her credit, including the long-known *Bread and Circuses.* From the eighty pages we take the stirring "Guns of London" :

Here they come !
Questioning—what do they question ? our courage, our pride,
Our skill of a nation of makers, our strength to abide
In defence of the living, in faith, with the brave who have died ?

Answer them, guns of London !
Here they come !
They shall have the reply that they ask for, whether they spin
To death on the earth they have threatened or turn them to win
(With the sting of our scorn in their vitals) the way to Berlin.
Answer them, guns of London !

Here they come !
They thought we were trifling, were sleeping, were dreaming ; but when
Have we slept, have we dreamt, on our hour ? We are waking again,
England that never failed England in gold, gear, or men !
Answer them, guns of London !

and a short lyric to the sun, "Tamquam Memoria Hospitis" :

I live alone, but not in gloom,
For every day the sun, my guest,
Looks in upon my small south room
On his sweet way from East to West.

None see him come, none see him go,
None speak of his approach or stay,
And none divine what weal or woe
Are mine when he is gone away.

Very recently in THE POETRY REVIEW we considered Mr. Sandburg's splendid book concerning Lincoln. The larger part of his new book *Home Front Memo* (Harcourt, Brace) concerns itself with the deep and passionate realisations brought to the entire world by this all-embracing war. Sandburg's graphic pen and temperamental gifts makes this a valuable addition to the literature concerning War II. It is difficult to see how any one writing to-day can avoid the subject of this war. We are glad that Mr. Sandburg did not, as his is a powerful contribution.

An interesting book has appeared recently entitled *Songs in the Morning,* an anthology of American Collegiate verse, the Harbinger Press, New York. Most of the authors' names in the index are naturally unfamiliar to the reading public, their ages not much more than twenty if as much, but the book is promising evidence of the concern of the college student with poetry in these 268 pages.

The Viking Press presents in their Portable Library *The Triumph of Life*, a collection of poems gathered and edited by Horace Gregory, an accomplished author himself, with many honours attending him. The book is six hundred pages, offering many appealing poems to meet the deeper needs of the heart found in poetry, written during some six hundred years. An ardent believer in the art of poetry, Mr. Gregory writes in his preface: "Anglo-American speech, which seems so abstract, so remote, so flat, so vague *in prose,* becomes a living word in poetry."

ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

TWENTY GUINEAS FOR A SONNET

The Poetry Society announce the offer, by a recent POETRY REVIEW sonneteer, of twenty guineas for the best unpublished sonnet in the Petrarchan form, submitted in open competition by May 30th, 1944. The competition will be judged by Lord Alfred Douglas, who has made a particular cult of the sonnet. Lord Alfred, in his recent address before the Royal Society of Literature, said, "The sonnet seems to me the highest form of English verse. It is indeed the very quintessence of form, and a poet who has really mastered it has nothing more to learn in the technique of English verse. Unfortunately, its rules are not always strictly observed nor even generally accepted, but I have always used what I conceive to be the correct Petrarchan form, with two rhymes only in the octave arranged A B B A A B B A, and two or three rhymes in the sestet arranged either CDE, CDE, or CD, CD, CD. It is not an easy medium to master and even great poets like Yeats show that they have sometimes been controlled by the rhyme-scheme instead of themselves controlling it, while Rossetti is often careless or slovenly in his rhyming. But a perfect Petrarchan sonnet is, to my mind, from the point of view of form, the greatest thing in English verse."

The Poetry Society shall become the owner of the copyright of the winning sonnet and may publish any of the other sonnets recommended by the adjudicator.

Any competitor submitting more than one sonnet shall be disqualified.

Each sonnet must bear name and address of the author, but *noms-de-plume* may be used if the name and address of the author are enclosed in separate envelope endorsed with the *nom-de-plume.*

The MS. and a stamped self-addressed envelope must be securely fastened together and addressed "Sonnet Competition, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1."

The decision of the judge shall be final.

POETS AND PRETENDERS

MESSRS. ROUTLEDGE send us four uniform volumes bound in stiff paper and priced at 2s. 6d. each, containing mainly reprints of poems already published in various books and periodicals, but with some new work. The issue is welcome and as timely as good things always are. These four are by Roy McFadden, Norman McCaig, George Woodcock and D. S. Savage, and we presume more are to follow. If these have the same strong vigour and a like positive virtue as of voices charged with much to say and the skill and power to say it, then we shall have a constant antidote to the stream of half-lit mediocrity which seems to come from and pass nowhere, but in its sluggish passage flows depressingly past our eyes that must review it in hopes of a darting nightingale or a leaping silvery trout. The first of these four, by chance, was "Swords and Ploughshares" by Roy McFadden. In one of his poems, "For Retired Rebels," he asks :

> Where is the lean, tight flame of faith,
> The vision greater than the four-walled self
> The naked vision bare as death,
> Lean, tight and pointed as the moon-trapped wolf ?

We would observe that in Mr. McFadden we see with gladness no sign of retirement, for we like his rebelliousness. He will never retire while so much is left to excite disgust in his eager eye. And yet he never forgets that he is a poet in the condemnations and lessons which he voices :

> Thunder my heresy to them,
> Hearing pale in sleep the doom
> Of wheels and phrophecy of steam,
> Clenched in the cold fist of a dream
> Tense in another space another time.

The quotation is taken from a short poem "Train at Mid-night" and beautifully expresses this subordination of the reformer to the poet, a subordination that, like love, inspires with a greater strength and a deeper emotion.

Next we took "A Time to Mourn" by D. S. Savage. This tells of a different, a more withdrawn, world, where nothing lives but the thoughts, often sad, of an introspective and contemplative mind. This is a realm full of substance for Mr. Savage and he reveals its beauty and reality with an unerring skill. He describes his calm method in :

> I await that ease and excellence of mind
> That intimates suave movement to the hand,
> Letting the typewriter shuttle off its lines
> To a slow march or stately saraband.

And indeed it is obvious that he indulges his mood and not his literary ambition when he fits a clean piece of paper into the carrier and draws up his chair. There is a delightful touch of the metaphysical in his imaginative dreaming which is exciting in the polished ease with which he so lucidly presents his difficult images. An example is

> O, had I certainty that Time's devouring
> Drained not all living through a bottomless glass,
> But in that process of incessant pouring
> Life poured within itself with no dispersal—
> That through these timeless hands might nothing pass
> That was not subject to a hand's reversal !

This book is both exciting and a rewarding addition to a new library.

Next we looked at Mr. Norman McCaig's *Far Cry*. Why this title ? The immediacy of his vibrant music seems to come from within the reader. His brooks

sang in my ears and his hot suns made me langourous. And yet it is indeed a far cry to pieces like this :

> No water in this quilted country dances
> or shivers in cool shocks in pots of limestone
> or melts the fiery flakes with bubble flounces
> or echoes birches with its shaggy fall,
> but in green pools holds its own funeral.

and to the other three stanzas of the poem of which this is the second. Mr. McCaig takes much of his inspiration and imagery from nature, which he observes with the unswooning vigour of an out-door man, who siezes the first bold epithet that occurs to his careless but exact fancy and rams it home into his context. There is here and there, perhaps, an excess of this gay insouciance, which leads him into some incoherency, or at any rate, into verse of some considerable difficulty. This is a pity, for when he is plain he is delightful, and consequently, when he is not we are depressed at what we may be missing.

Last, not least, but different, is *The Centre Cannot Hold* by George Woodcock, a volume difficult to describe in a phrase, so varied are the contents, not only in subject but in mood and treatment. The poems are full of fine imagery of that simple rectitude, which is so convincing. Indeed, the work is all unforced and if there is here and there an enigmatical quality difficult to penetrate the appetite is rather whetted than otherwise. There is, however, here and there a strong touch of morbidity, which by its very lack of reticence is quite devoid of beauty, whatever excellence it has as poetry. Speaking of a dead girl he writes :

> Her eyes are liquid,
> Dripping into mud,
> Cover them with shillings—
> Her thighs were fair and good.

and later in the same poem :

> Flower lips have withered
> Snarling on carious teeth.
> Touch that gave glory
> Shocks with cold death.

There is, of course, in this sort of thing, a ghoulish satisfaction which appeals to some residue of immaturity in the unqueamish, but it rather savours of the *enfant terrible* to think time well-spent in writing it. We should regret, however, to give the impression that this is characteristic of the book as a whole. We singled this out as an example of what, in our view, is not permissible in poetry, the revolting close-up which has as little to do with true pathos as a protruding tongue with dignity. Mr. Woodcock's vigorous style and imagination, when diverted into less purulent paths, is both enticing and sustaining.

Tongues of Fire by Elizabeth Pinney Hunt, a Philadelphia publication by Dorrance and Co., priced at $1.00, is a collection of forty-eight sonnets and odes which give every indication of sincerity and competent versification, but which are altogether too nebulous to capture either imagination or interest. Allusiveness can be a great ornament to any literary work, but overdone it merely becomes a cloud in which nothing is apprehended clearly and where, if one wanders on, all touch with reality and direction is lost. So with these sonnets, which, although they met the technical demands of a form technically difficult, with a nice fluent ease, yet left us at a loss to discover the coherence and while we were pleased with good lines, these together seemed, like things seen in mist, to add up to nothing concrete and satisfyingly whole.

We felt in reading that there was in each of them a thought and an intention, probably beautiful, which never wholly communicated itself, but remained a nebula.

The odes are unhappily similarly amorphous. The themes are admittedly slight and it almost appears as if the authoress had tried to get more out of her measure than its cubic content, becoming recondite in the process. There was also another volume in this batch from the same publisher and the same pen. *Tendrils* is another collection of sonnets, some in the Shakespearean mode, which are not strictly speaking sonnets at all, but fourteen-line poems, and some in a modified Petrarchan form, which dispenses with repetitive rhymes in the second quatrain of the octave. In spite of this easing of the technical rigours of sonneteering the result, we think, is poor. Words are not used, we think, with that nicety and easy adequacy which the sonnet demands. There is the same cloudiness and basic weakness in rhyming which we noted in *Tongues of Fire*. Rhyme should never appear to control the development of a poem nor result in difficulty or obscurity.

The charge of nebulosity can certainly not be levelled against the next volume, *The Nine Bright Shiners*, by Anne Ridler (Faber, 6s.). But here the revealed beauty was, if not disappointing, not sufficiently arresting to carry off the casualness of the rhythm and rhyme. Should a poet have a mind above the incidental persuasions of music and leave us or her fate to the mercy of a versified prose? The question is put rhetorically, we require no answer. Much, very much of this work is no more and no less than good prose, its imagery no brighter than a good prose writer should and does use, and it is published as poetry presumably upon the strength of its visual pattern. Even the emotional content is spilt and wasted in such a piece as "For a Child Expected" and it almost seems as though Mrs. Ridler felt this herself when she wrote the concluding quatrain in a rhyme and rhythm which would not altogether displease the most die-hard traditionalist.

> May no parental dread or dream
> Darken our darling's early beam:
> May she grow to her right powers
> Unperturbed by passion of ours.

The need of poetry as we see it is to use an idiom utterly different from that of prose. For this the poet must say his say, having deliberately fettered himself with rhyme, but good rhyme, and rhythm, but true rhythm, not one which is unconcerned with syllabic stresses. The discipline is wholesome, since it makes for compression and suggests imagery and, like all disciplines, is rewarded as mastery is gained by a new strength and an added significance.

The Fountain of Hellas by John Irvine (Derrick MacCord, 3s. 6d.) which came next to hand took the foregoing words out of our mouth with about thirty short poems and a prefactory poem in a truly grecian perfection of form wherein the sentiments, trite enough after twenty centuries or so of human experience, gain new life and beauty by the accomplished artistry of their presentation. There is, of course, nothing new to say, nor any new ways to say it, which merely suggests to us the growing necessity to say the old things ever more austerely and beautifully as time goes on. The inspiration of these poems is ascribed to various translations of classic Greek poetry; the result has often the authentic note of a Fitgerald singing under the inspiration of a less fabulous Omar. One could quote from anywhere in the book and find justification for taking the space. Let us take one whole poem of eight lines, called "A Gourmand" (after Nicarchus):

> Since mortals all are doomed to die
> What matter then if I go out,

Trained like the mighty Heracles
Or slowly limping with the gout ?

Strong arms will lift me when I sleep—
Oh, damn ! I'm lame, but I will dine
While goodly fare and friends abound
And I can lift a bowl of wine.

Most of these poems have this genial philosophic attitude and Hellenic grace, and in their simplicity achieve a real success.

To acquire a husband and a baby daughter at the tender age of twenty and not to be content without a book of poems seems to us to exemplify this overweening age. Yet such is the happy announcement of the authoress of *Green Leaves,* Mrs. Joan M. Seager (Stockwell, 6d.) We may congratulate her upon the husband and the daughter but not upon the poems, even at 6d. We will add that the fact that these verses were written at the age of 17 or 18 makes the matter no better. These ages are not too young for good or even immortal poetry, but for this sort of thing, and we would say it as kindly as possible, far too old.

Is there some special merit in writing verse that so many people succumb to the urge. The possession of infinitely more valuable attributes still, as we have lately seen, fails to cure their possessor of this yearning born of a love of words and alas, little else of those qualities which go to make a poet. *Nature Studies* by Rev. W. Mears (Stockwell, 6s.) prompts this thought. The volume, containing over one hundred pieces, is quite devoid of poetic merit. The verses are pedestrian and without general interest save possibly as a personal record for their author.

A dead poet is better than a live versifier which may serve to introduce a volume by Michael Walsh, whom the introduction tells us died in December, 1938. The volume *Walls in the Grass,* with a preface by Theodore Maynard (Talbot Press, 2s. 6d.), is full of that Hiberian yearning which has such appeal for the more phelgmatic Anglo-Saxon. "Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the Sea" thrills us as much as it ever did an Irishman. The late Michael Walsh varies it as follows :

The far ridge of the Ben of Fore
Lies ever on the heart's horizon !

This is a sample of the simple lyrical gift which he possessed and where he gives it rein we are delighted. But he is not always conscious, as men seldom are, of his true aptitude and in free verse, of which there is much, he is not to our way of thinking so good. Yet what fault could be found with :

When April hung a bough
And set a bird to sing

or :

The long sea murmur of the hill-side pines
The misty yews that hold arrested winds.

As befitted his race the author always sang, even when he forewent the music of rhyme, and by his death at so young an age a poet was prematurely lost to Eire and to the English tongue.

Another Dorrance book, this time by Mary Ellis Robins, entitled *The Golden Rose* ($2.00), presents the patient reviewer with 190 pages of spirituality cum sentiment which the authoress describes in a foreword as a pilgrimage in the quest of the Way to the Mount of Vision and Happy Life. Mrs. Robins dutifully describes for us in her gentle manner the landmarks of her mental journey, but the impression left upon our mind is much like that deposited by any other cicerone or guide who has conducted us on sight-seeing tours. There is no power of conviction in spite of the

writer's sincerity and on the technical side there is also some lack of achievement. The trouble is in the superficial approach. Spiritual lessons are not to be given or received in slight verse and we are afraid we were not much edified after our labours. We were amused by one piece called "Business is Business," an affair in rather staccato free verse, which deals with the request of a rich investor to her broker to sell out stock in "The Hotel Laissez Faire," paying 8 per cent. and re-invest in a mortgage at 4 per cent. on a "Country Rest" for mothers and young children. No doubt about the ethical rightness of mortgages, at interest, on charitable institutions occurs to Mrs. Robins's mind, which might be awkward if the need of foreclosure ever arose, nor is it apparent in the verse that possibly the 8 per cents. will realise enough to provide double the sum at 4 per cent. and the change over be no loss. Mere business, of course, but the moral is go deeply into your subject before you attempt to instruct or edify others. This is not Mrs. Robins's way and it seems almost unkind to cavil at the unquestioning simplicity which can accept usury only when there is some show of serving a Christianity which denounces it.

The Motionless Dancer by Peter Yates (Chatto and Windus, 5s.) takes its name from the first and longest poem in the book. This is a work of some beauty and imaginative depth, but the author has not had all the skill of word he needed to carry us smoothly with him on his flight. We were always letting go and catching up a bit later, which marred our enjoyment. The same might be said of the other poems in the book. There are too many moments when difficulty and even obscurity comes between us and Mr. Yates like an irritating and irrational mist which we do not think is beyond his power to prevent. He is not yet committed we hope to a style wherein a too great economy and too much chiselling must leave his work inadequately poised and not, as the dust-cover has it, "A monument which is meant to outlast its time." Apart from this unnecessary characteristic the work is vigorous and thought provoking. We are not, frankly, able to say how good it may be and as critics of poetry we cannot commit ourselves to either praise or blame where we are denied a coherent message. This weakness is fatal if ignored and we earnestly commend its care to the author.

The Canonbury Square Fire Guard send us a booklet entitled *Canonbury Watch* by E.S.H., which we suspect stands for E. S. Hole, whose name is appended to the dedication. The whole is written in amazingly competent rhymed couplets in a rhythm which is always musical and avoids any tum-ti-tum monotony. The poems are, all (save one and the dedication) character sketches of members of the Fire Guard, but deal with them a thought too gently and superficially to have much appeal, beyond their technical competence, to any outsider or we think even to the victims themselves. That is the rub, they should have been true victims and made to squirm and rejoice as the eye singled them out and then passed on to another. The poems are too bloodless in their ignoring of those weaknesses which we all have and which nobody really minds being held up for inspection, if this be done with understanding and good humour. Still, the work is of a polished excellence, without padding or striving for rhyme, which reflects a real gift for words. We should like to see more of it on a subject upon which the author will let himself go.

The difficulty about left-wing writing, that is, the political left-wing, is that so often it is very little else. The revolutionary energy released runs, therefore, largely to waste, creating an ephemeral noise and, beyond preaching to the converted, doing little actual service to the cause. We are moved to this reflection by the receipt of the first issue of *Million* (W. McLellan, Glasgow, 2s.), which contains prose and verse of the kind described as "new left writing." The collection is edited by John Singer

and contains contributions by many well-known people.

We, of course, are interested in the verse which forms a not inconsiderable proportion of the whole, and we would say at once that this is the usual sort of thing and disappointing on the whole. Poetry can be so significantly powerful in the illustration of truth that, being in entire agreement with those who desire a new world, we were depressed as at an opportunity missed. It is, alas, true that strong convictions are apt to monopolise their possessor, but it is also true that art demands their subordination and sublimation if good missionary poetry is to result. Perhaps, however, we are missing the point. Only a few of the contributions in verse form are called "Poems" and this may have been intentional. If so, why was the verse form used for the others and why were two fine pieces by Miles Carpenter, "Lament for a Lover" and "The Quick of the Preen," given titles. The "Poems" were mainly rather slight affairs in very vigorous language, while the others were not poetry at all but good doggerel or plain politics. We instance in the former class a piece by S. G. Smith about Lorca, in broad Scots, and a translation from Bertold Bricht, and in the latter a contribution by Hugh McDiarmid, "A Poet rejects a Right-Wing Plea," in which the poet is quite submerged in the left-winger.

The truth, we suppose, is that art will not lend itself to argument or direct assertion, but gathers its strength in a remoter hinterland of spiritual vision, its tremendous potentiality only to be utilised for the broad, general advancement of the spirit of man. When one comes to think of it, there is little to be hoped for from special pleading upon an issue, not narrow, but still not illimitable, directed to a spiritual consciousness which can only advance all along the line and in one piece over the whole breadth of its vision.

In our last issue we reviewed a book by Cyril Harrey, *El Alamein and other Poems,* which, by a typing error, was ascribed to Cyril Harvey ; but we have in addition to confess that, in one of those moments of inattentiveness (even Homer nods) we gave the impression, by an ill-chosen phrase, that the rhymes in the five sonnets, which formed one section of the book, were faulty. Our phrase was "casual at times with rhymes." We gladly make amends. The rhyming save in two instances is good. What we intended to say was that the rhyming scheme used was, at times, casual in that it ignored the imperative and arbitrary rules for this form of verse. Three of these sonnets are in the Shakespearean mode and in the opinion of authoritative sonneteers are therefore but fourteen-line poems. It was with the other two that we gently quarrelled. The rhyme scheme for the true or Petrarchan sonnet is, of course, ABBA ABBA for the octave and CD CD CD or CDE CDE. When this scheme is varied at the whim or to the taste of a poet we conceive the result to be less than a sonnet, since the amendments result nearly always in an avoidance of difficulty.

Why is it that translations of poetry so seldom seem to repay the devoted labour and skill of those who, able to read the original text, are fired with the desire to bring its beauty to a wider alien public ? We suppose it to be due to the unavoidable loss of that native texture of expression, so much finer than mere colloquialism, but just as impossible of translation into another tongue. This obstinately native quality bears too vital a part in the mysterious verbal appeal that is an ingredient of all true poetry not to become sadly conspicuous by absence, and this must be doubly true of all poetry of simple tone such as the Russian.

Reading *A Book of Russian Verse,* edited by C. M. Bowra (Macmillan, 8s. 6d.) and containing translations, by many hands, of work by most of the Russian poets known to us, we were very conscious of this flatness. It seemed impossible that great

(*continued on page 56*)

WAR POETS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

JOHN WALLER, now attached to the M.o.I. in the Middle East, reports: Since the war began the cry has been raised in the Press and elsewhere: "Where are the war poets? Where are the people who in this war are the equivalent of Brooke, Owen, Sassoon, Grenfell, Thomas, and so on in the last?" The cry has been raised *ad nauseam*. But actually the poets have been there all the time, not widely publicised because their themes were not immediately apparent or not recognisable as official—it is an unfortunate fact that since 1918 poetry has advanced intellectually at a very much faster rate than journalism.

Meanwhile in the first four years of war there have been several notable anthologies of war poetry produced in England, of which the three that stand out—differing as they do in content—are Routledge's *Poems from the Forces,* the Cambridge University Press *Poems of this War,* and Faber's *Poetry in War-time.*

Now, however, an entirely distinctive book is added to these with the publication in Cairo of *Oasis,* the Middle East Anthology of Poetry from the Forces. I say distinctive because only three out of the fifty-one contributors to this collection have appeared in the English anthologies, and also because it might be expected that poets who had seen actual service in the Middle East would discover in their work a greater range of experience and a greater depth of feeling than those who in the main—through no fault of their own—have not been beyond their own country.

John Cromer, in an article prefacing the book on *Poetry To-day,* states: "The soldier-poet has a double allegiance—to the military machine of which he forms a part, and to his art to which he is bound." And this is true, in so far as one can imagine many of these poems being written in the flickering light of a tent oil lamp, on the greasy surfaces of "Naafi" tables in transit camps, with the noise of drinkers for a background, in the pause between actions even, or some, perhaps, in those bright intervals of leave in the gay cities of Egypt, Palestine or Syria.

Among so many contributors it would be invidious to select names for individual mention; instead, I will consider the themes of their poetry, for in a symbolical sense this book is the work of one man, the Unknown Poet of the War in the Middle East.

The first theme that one expects to find in Middle East poetry is that of *Farewell,* of sailing away from England:

> Grey gulls gleaming on the grey river—
> White wings weaving in the wan sky—
> Thrust the flanks and the bows quiver
> As the dark waves roll by.

Henceforward it is a new land and a new destiny that awaits. The old things are finished. And then, because most of these poets are young, it is of youth they next think:

> The upturned, tousled smile of boys who come
> Unknown, unknowing, from back single rooms,
> From bicycles in passages, and ride to war.

The war is the tragedy of youth, because it is youth that fights and dies and cannot be recovered. But youth accepts the tragedy—as Brooke accepted it, as Grenfell, Owen and Thomas accepted it—because it is necessary:

> I saw young men in youth and pride
> Grow god-like, laughing in the sun.

But the sacrifice does not dispense with the need for love, for "the rolling rhythm of the love the body seeks." Some make do with a substitute for this love, with letters from home and pictures, with a memory of it—these are those who have "over

each heart an enchanted figure someone to adore." Others again need the real flesh and the real blood.

On the whole, however, it is not love but death that predominates, death and his comrade horror. One says, "To-morrow I shall sow another political corpse, or be dead myself." Another :

The Devil played the drums when Peter died
An overture of bombs and crashing sound
A whirling slip of splinter caught his side
And deftly sent his body spinning round.

It is pleasant to consider, but on the whole not very satisfying that :

The waves are crying for him
And wind blows back the tears.

And lastly, there is horror with its accompaniment of :

The shattered bodies of children whose quicksilver
Has run away, or the woman whose mature joy
Ended with a bayonet in a back room.

But possibly, neither death nor horror are so irksome to the poet as monotony, the same old thing day after dreary day :

The sand, the spewed up, shattered rock,
The chaos of hours, the tired confusion.

The same old voice each meal-time saying, "There's M and V as good as anything. And canned pineapple," duties, fatigues, patrols, boredom that is worse than death, prompting at last the outburst :

The rain blows West and the moon is hazy,
The food is lousy and the cooks are lazy.

The only relief from this is what the normal soldier would look upon as "fun," but what the poet can only consider as fun with an exclamation mark ! The life of cafés; camp cinemas, drinking in the "Naafi" bars :

In airless evenings at the café table
The soldier sips his thick sweet coffee up.

Can one imagine anything more dreary ? Infinitely preferable, at least to this, is :

Seven men in Cairo,
Seven men in gaol
Mad as hell and drunk as well—

At least there's a satisfaction in that.

And so, at long last, the poet is driven back on his memories, the only things that can any longer please him, those "certain moments that make pictures for always." Sometimes they are memories of love—"here are your hard lips on mine and good-bye and good-bye"—but these are not quite perfect because they dull :

I have a fear that so much love
And so much faith, these previous scents
May turn insipid and become
The strangling memory of events.

Better, perhaps, are memories of England, of the country left behind.

And keep these too : dew-feathered lawns of Autumn,
And morning mists soft-rolling from the sun ;
October's winds a-prey on Summer's sweetness,
And brown leaves fluttering earthwards one by one,
Stern winter days, and lamplit dusks snow falling—
Long cosy teas, and toast, and fire's bright hue . . .

In these themes perhaps can be seen the whole problem of the poet in war-time, an unsatisfactory person on the whole, perhaps, because so often he does not fit in, but remains always rather like "a sad child with a bobbin on a string."

The C.-in-C., Middle East, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, says in a foreword to this collection of Middle East Poetry: "I consider *Oasis* very aptly named, because of the pleasure that it will give to many who have found war an aesthetic desert." Apart from this the book is important because it is the poetry of the Middle East, which may turn out to be the poetry of the war.

NOTE.—*Oasis* is obtainable from Keith Bullen, Esq., Salamander Productions, 121 Sharia Malika Nazli, Cairo, Egypt, at a price of Six Shillings (including postage).

(*continued from page 53*)

names, and many of the names in this anthology are great, could be built on such foundations and we could conclude only that the bright fire which conferred immortality on so many masterpieces was really incommunicable in an alien tongue.

The work of translation and the adroit new versification both seemed to us excellent, nor should one exclude the irrelevant interest of such a book. That the master's brush is too deft for any disciple to emulate, without the added and insuperable difficulty of repeating his simple subtleties, his verbal nuances, in a new medium as unlike the old as can be, is no reason why the editor is not to be congratulated on an effort, both as selector and translator, which bears every sign of great competence and literary skill. That he has attempted the impossible does nothing to detract from the value of his book as possibly an unsurpassed compilation of Russian poetry in our language.

Landmarks, a book of topographical verse for England and Wales, edited by G. Rostrevor Hamilton and John Arlott (Cambridge University Press, 8s. 6d.) is a delightful handbook of places, compiled with a firm hand and admirable discrimination. The presence of a place-name in a poem dominated by human mood or philosophical dissertation has not satisfied the topographical exactitude of the editors, hence Thomas Hardy and Robert Bridges (among other possible contributors) are not as fully represented as less exacting compilers would have allowed. But while being precise in their interpretation of their theme, their net might have been thrown wider. They have made some slight use of Longfellow's collection of *Poems of Places,* but have apparently not tested the possibilities of Mrs. Alice Hunt Bartlett's Anthology of Cities, which grew out of a POETRY REVIEW competition. And THE POETRY REVIEW has published many apt place poems and attempted at one time a series of such poems, localised by subject as well as contributors, while more recent issues have contained admirable examples of this genre, notably John T. Kirk's delicate and faithful etching of Barnard Castle. And, of course, one finds one's preferences overlooked. Swinburne is drawn on to describe Bath and Cornwall in two fragments, but his more characteristic and noble "Northumberland" is not used to describe his own county; and the poems of Wiltshire by Alfred Williams have been overlooked. But we do not disparage a well-executed scheme which will stimulate territorial loyalties and by inclusion or omission revive the love we bear for a particular bit of England, and may perhaps serve as the nucleus of a more comprehensive, many-minded "Poly-Olbion." Artists in another medium have just completed a pictorial record of Britain, financed by the Pilgrim Trust. Why have not contemporary poets been given a similar commission? They could describe more faithfully and completely the topographical beauties and features of our beloved land.

TO THE EDITOR.

ENOUGH PRETENCE!

Poetry to-day is very nearly dead and those qualities which must of necessity be part of the construction of any real poem go completely unrecognised by experts and the general public alike. I have never yet heard a completely satisfying definition of poetry, nor for that matter have I ever heard a final explanatory description of music or any other art. A work of art is an elusive spirit and it is very difficult to bring about its materialisation at any given time for any given reason. The centre and cornerstone of art has always been imagination, embracing as it does both the creative and the intuitive faculties, and imaginative writing always has the same effect on the outside observer in that it stimulates his own imagination and recreates for him something approaching the mood of the writer; the same heightened emotion, the same throb of life. But modern poetry, with very few exceptions, has drifted away from this conception, down an alleyway largely frequented by intellectual high-brows and left-wing political agitators. The problem with which the modern poet is faced (and here I speak from personal experience) is to reconcile the world of phenomena (buses, trams, aeroplanes, bombs and party preachers) with the world of spiritual values. Unfortunately the modern poet has lost, together with ninety-nine per cent. of his fellow creatures, that firm grip on the spiritual aspect of reality which alone produces great art. The resultant discordance is painful and makes itself felt not only in the thought content of the poems, but in the very technique of writing; the stabiliser of the poet's soul has been removed and nothing has taken its place. But this is all generalisation and airy summarising. Let us look deeper into the matter and more in detail.

The list of "modern" poets mounts daily as more and more people desire to give expression to the consciousness of their own individuality. This is an encouraging sign from the point of view of mankind in general. It is not encouraging for those interested in the welfare of poetry, because these "poets" simply do not know what poetry is and cannot write it themselves!

Without doubt the biggest poet of our day is Mr. Eliot. Personally I admire his work very much indeed, his content is always deep and worth while, his technique often extremely good. Yet I know that Mr. Eliot has not that peculiar quality of greatness as far as his poetry is concerned. To start with, large chunks of his poems are simply prose, rhythmed it is true, but prose nevertheless, though this is not the real weakness in his writing. Mr. Eliot lacks that capacity for passionate thought, that faculty of emotionally-charged vision and intuition, which was the greatest of the virtues of the poet Shelley, whom Mr. Eliot dislikes so much! He is too matter-of-fact and his mind is more suited to critical work than to the creation of art. No, Mr. Eliot, himself, has not the quality of greatness, but his influence on the poets of the present day and of future generations is far more important than his own intrinsic poetic worth. He pointed out to the world of would-be poets that they had forgotten how to use their own language. Once more the battlements of poetic diction were stormed and the "language of ordinary men" flooded the ruins. Thus, Mr. Eliot did poetry a great service, but his followers, naturally enough, carried his rediscovery too far. "The language of ordinary men" can never be used in poetry; Wordsworth tacitly admitted the fact in all the greatest of his poems; let us take for example the "Intimations of Immortality," where the treatment of the not so simple theme is extremely noble and elevated. But what Wordsworth and Eliot both achieved was in reality the enlargement and therefore the enrichment of the poetic vocabulary.

In addition to this Mr. Eliot decided that his best instrument for self-expression was *vers libre*. He uses it extremely well and as a craftsman it is his own particular

line of business. Unfortunately it lends itself to all sorts of abuses, all of which have made many appearances in the works of the writers he influenced. Poetic licence can become an excuse for calling one's prose compositions poetry, and again this modern endency is strongly in evidence.

There are thousands of other modern poets, few so good as Mr. Eliot, the majority in a category which can only be described as bad. Poetry as such is becoming very rare. Let us try to find some examples which really illustrate the soul and essence of poetry. Listen to Blake, one of the purest poets who have ever lived :

I burst the crystal cabinet
And like a weeping babe became,
A weeping babe upon the wild.

That is poetic experience ; or Shelley :

Life like a dome of many coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments.

There is a truth and a joy and a realisation in these lines which is the very core of poetry. How much better if the modern poets could say with G. M. Hopkins "Thou mastering me God!" What ecstasy and devotion burst forth in that line.

The truth of the matter is this. The modern poet has become a prey to superficial thinking ; he tries to be a politician as well as a poet ; and thus his content is inadequate ; he is not insincere, but lacks that passionate conviction which is an integral part of most great artistic achievements. In a word he is too cold and objective. Finally, in spite of his craftsmanship he often oversteps himself ; his form is too loose, and form is always an important factor in any work of art, classical or romantic.

Therefore, I recommend, not a retrogression to what is old and worn out, but a re-establishment of those timeless precepts without which poetry cannot exist. We must move forward, we must seek new and fresh inspiration, but let us first make sure of the sources of our inspiration ; let us make certain we are getting the genuine article. A change of heart is necessary, a reorientation of values. The poet must lead the way to a new world.

Victoria Barracks, Windsor. PETER RAILING.

A DEFENSE OF A NON-DEFENSE OF POETRY

Since Homer poets, pseudo-poets and critics have written defenses of poetry. Need we write defenses of the air we breathe ? or the food we eat ? Need we write a defense of the sunset ? or the storm ? If poetry is the highest plane of human expression, if it is our nearest approach to the "absolute," does it need a defense ?

The actual poetic appreciators are a rather quiet minority. They see, they feel, they understand. These appreciators, however, give off a smug self-satisfaction, an air of superiority, or a monk-like silence.

If poetry is all that Sir Philip Sidney, Shelley, Wordsworth, Arnold and others would have us believe, why, during the poetic or "plastic" period, when young people are exposed to its virus, doesn't it "take" in the mass, rather than in the few isolated instances, marked by their inability to express or reason ? From that hot-blooded multitude of youths a few dreary-eyed fanatics or over-emotionalised females become the poetic "defenders of the future." Their "appreciation" has many faces : some speak of originality as the supreme essence, others are voluble on technical excellence, others babble of "imagism," "the thing itself," some become explainers of the obvious or, even worse, explainers of the non-poetic strainings of self-conscious asininity, or go into the nuances of surrealism and that which is beyond the scope of the senses, intelligence and feeling. Yet others lead us into the mystical cycle, having to do with

the wholly intangible "ideal." Seemingly, in the poetic world, all is bedlam. However, when the "full-grown poet comes" he is serenely unaware of the cliques, schools and artistic debaters. He, despite contemporaneous platitudes, incongruities and handicaps, speaks a clear language. His most minute phrases are poetry. Throughout the ensuing centuries a few earnest persons thrill to hear his echo and wonder why.

But what is poetry ? I ask the question and no one answers. I am told that it is probably undefinable in that it has not been defined in over four thousand years of recorded history. Yet, individually and personally, it is supposed to identify itself. Furthermore, I am told that it is the most powerful influence in the life of man, that it is the highest fruits of his wit and wisdom, the essence of his intuitive or subconscious self. Unfortunately, I am left in a puzzled and questioning state. Should I be prepared to march the outposts in defense of any of these intangible and unprovable statements ? For instance, despite O'Shaughnessy and the cliche that he who writes the poetry of a nation dominates, I am convinced that the great poets never have and never will dominate in the sense suggested. I will not oppose the fact that their domination would be better for the world, nor will I attempt to refute the obvious endless virility of a Shakespeare. But Shakespeare was not a potent force when he lived, nor is he to-day. The history of English literature is filled with Doctor Johnsons and Drydens.

There is something far deeper in "poor humanity" than all this. The vast majority is not attuned to the great chord. They are poetic-deaf. Poetry to them is not understandable ; therefore, it is denominated an unhealthy jargon of sounding phrases "signifying nothing," fit only for weaklings. That this superficial dogma of the masses and the "practical" men roots in a combination of lack of intelligence, lack of depth, selfish interest, and a faulty critical judgment that places weaklings in the poetic chair does not alter the fact.

When the majority thus concludes and agrees that the sickly harpings of the contemporaneous artist does not portray and is not in any way affiliated with this earthly world, poetry is dismissed as an idle calling of the unbalanced mind, the mental dance of the seven veils of the exhibitionist-pretender. And to a point they are right : the truly poetic mind is out of balance with erroneous "practical" affairs. He who writes golden words in terms of great royalties is quite probably a caterer to the erroneously expedient, hence is either not capable of or makes no attempt to understand the poetic concept. The poet innately does not and can not concur with the mistaken majority and, therefore, is in continuous revolt against the work-a-day world ; for he sees clearly the man-made errors, the man-made botch of the "absolute," or "what man has done to man." His tunes and overtones carry the convictions of something finer, something better than anything we have known. They are rooted in the implications of the potentiality of man rather than in the actual works of man. They emphasise the heroic of the commonplace.

And this we know : poetry is the virile after-life of a civilisation ; therefore, it is obviously the soundings of the "soul" of a people. The "soul" of a person or of a people, however, if not silent during the bustle and hurly-burly of life, is relatively unheard, due to the echo and reverberation of nothing. But it will be heard in its given time, the great after-silence.

Therefore, I do not defend poetry ; poetry must and will defend itself. It will continue to burn itself so deeply in a few receptive minds that even as Christianity withstood the Roman butchers, it will withstand the continuing and ever-present calamities of this world. Has not poetry already ably demonstrated that it can and will outlive the fall of nations, the death of civilisations, the devastation of races and the heavy silence of a "dark ages" ?

Lt.-Col., Ft. Douglas, Utah. CULLEN JONES.

PROSE POEMS

I find that Mr. W. R. Dennett-Morgan, in the December number of THE POETRY REVIEW, refers to a letter of mine under this heading, and in course of doing so makes this statement: "Mr. Bourne's letter suggests a question: 'Wherein does poetry differ from prose?' and unfortunately he then proceeds to beg the question." I rather object to Mr. Dennett-Morgan saying that, because a little more careful perusal of my letter might have convinced him of the contrary. He quotes words of mine, immediately before which I had written this, *viz.*: *"what indeed is not the most important, but at the same time is an essential part of poetry; I mean that particular expression of language which results in a technique of varying forms which has in both ancient and modern times made the difference between poetry and prose."* I cannot see in this direct assertion any attempt to beg the question. I therefore repeat this rudimentary statement in slightly amplified form and will now say that this difference consists in the language of poetry being expressed in lines of measured and duly accented words forming a sequence of rhythmical sounds, as opposed to prose, which is not so expressed.

And here I would make it quite plain I do not imply that the mere observance of these conditions will of itself result in poetry. In all the gradations from verse to fine poetry I think these conditions apply and that poetry cannot be written apart from compliance with them; they constitute the means by which it may be brought into being when the mind of a poet, his ideas and words attuned harmoniously, catches faint echoes if "inexpressive" thoughts, or when homely utterance of things which lie close to humanity's heart, captures our fancy.

Therefore, I say it is in the particular expression forming the language uttered by the poet that this difference is to be found rather than in any schedule of theoretical qualities which may or may not apply; and as to the limitations imposed by convention, have these, in fact, not grown from the usage of the poets themselves, following poetic expression rather than forming it?

Thetford. RAYMUND BOURNE.

"POETS AND PRETENDERS"

I should like to remark that the last issue of THE POETRY REVIEW, even more than usual, seems to show a markedly catholic pleasure in a great bulk of rather indifferent "traditional" verse and a markedly narrow distaste for some better verse that it condemns as "modern." I should have thought by now that people would have realised that "modern verse" is as much in the tradition as that of any other age, and considerably more so than that of some periods. Nor can I bring myself to believe that the lines

> Flicker to rest in thy last urn
> To move but with the Planet's turn

are either deftly economical or simply beautiful, or indeed good in any way at all. What they in fact mean is very little at all, and the imaginative reader, if he does not let his imagination run away with him, will probably remember that much the same thought has been expressed before incomparably better by William Wordsworth in one of his poems about Lucy. And do you ever talk of a thing's "turn" (unless, of course, you have to force a rhyme with urn) in any other sense than in "it's my turn now"?

Later on the same reviewer—and as the review is unsigned is it meant to represent the views of the Society itself?—speaks of the verbal surrealism of a couple of lines by J. F. Hendry which, whatever their merits, have a perfectly clear meaning: no doubt if any of your readers take a second glance at them they will find that out for

themselves ; I don't see why I should take the trouble to explain them to your reviewer, who obviously hasn't looked twice at them, but, if any one doubts that the meaning is simple, I will be quite willing to explain it to them on receipt of a twopenny-halfpenny stamp.

The point I am making is that a reviewer in an official organ such as THE POETRY REVIEW should not be allowed to get away with such things unchallenged. There has been talk of Royal Societies of Poetry and things of that kind and, as some people have pointed out, an official organisation already exists in The Poetry Society ; theoretically nothing more is needed. But what is needed is the creation of some standard of taste. A country's literature flourishes to a great extent in accordance with the acuteness of its critics and, if there is, as Lord Wavell seems to think, a dearth of good poetry at present, it is due to the poverty of our criticism and more particularly to the kind of generalised inaccuracy and lack of thought of which I am complaining in the above instances. To speak of Mr. Bowen as a poet of a high order on the strength of two poor lines of verse, or to speak loosely of the verbal surrealism of an author one does not like, without troubling to see that the lines in question have a perfectly logical meaning, this does not create a standard, but lowers everything to inconsequence.

I make no apology for taking up so much space on this matter, for it is of importance. I am not denying that critics will differ about the merits of various writers, of course they will. What I am doing is protesting against a lowering of the standards of criticism. I am not averse from your critic having a different opinion to myself, but I am averse from his making demonstrably foolish or false statements in order to support his view. For the ordinary reader, reading his review quickly, may thereby receive a quite false impression. That Mr. Bowen is one of the greatest living poets, for instance ! And that seems to me an indefensible *reductio ad absurdum*. Probably, in fact, Mr. Bowen is not even a good poet.

The legitimate function of a body such as The Poetry Society is to maintain and create a standard of taste. In so far as it fails to do this, it fails in its other aims, and Matthew Arnold, a puritan critic if ever there was one, would have been the first to realise this. Why Mr. Eliot is so venerated—apart from his abilities as a poet—is because he has stood in the minds of many people for the maintenance of a standard in criticism in a time when standards were dissolving. It is a burden he has borne well. But it is a certain criticism of The Poetry Society and other organisations of a literary nature that he has done this almost alone. But what matters is the future. If "the decline of poetry in the esteem of the general public" which Lord Wavell regrets is to be counteracted and, if The Poetry Society is to fill its function properly, an intelligent and adult criticism must be created and maintained : otherwise the maintenance of a standard will again be vested in some solitary figure or in some group or groups other than The Poetry Society and, if those groups or that figure lack the possibilities of so wide an influence as the Society possesses, the decline will go on and poetry will become worse and worse. For, in spite of the familiar fables of the poet's loneliness and solitude, a great poetry only arises from the interest of the people in it and, more particularly from the quality of that interest. There have recently been many who have been interested in the works of writers for their political or social message, but that is not enough. Nor is it sufficient to be interested in the writer's *aims* as so many are, even if they be aesthetic, rather than in his performance.

It is hardly necessary to point out what great good The Poetry Society can do in this respect : but will it ? It depends on the elimination of the characteristic weaknesses of which I have been speaking.

Cambridge, December 5th, 1943. NICHOLAS MOORE.

The Reviewer replies: If I remain anonymous I need not be dumb. In the face of attacks upon my integrity as an impartial critic, I hope to be allowed to express some of my mental reactions to Mr. Moore's letter. This gentleman protests too much to appear very sure of his own case. My second reaction was to marvel at the mental confusion which speaks, as Mr. Moore does, of my making demonstrably foolish and false statements to support my view. Does your correspondent not realise that statements, however foolish and false, must arise from views, or does he always put the cart before the horse? Does this not result in meaningless meanderings where all might have been simple and direct? The cart—the vehicle of words—is the main thing, while Pegasus, the horse, with or without wings, must hide his head under the tail-board and bellow from his hinder end.

Let us join poor modern Pegasus and come to earth. The lines to which Mr. Moore takes exception:

> Flicker to rest in thy last urn
> To move but with the planet's turn.

are said by him to have neither beauty, economy nor goodness and to mean very little at all. Yet it seems, and my authority is Mr. Moore, that Wordsworth has expressed much the same thought, only "incomparably better." Well! well! Mr. Wordsworth, are you to share the same fate at Mr. Moore's hands as the late Mr. Milton at Mr. Eliot's? Or does the "incomparably better" save you? It is pretty certain that you were not more economical in your phrases, you would hardly be that, but you only expressed "incomparably better" than Mr. Bowen a thought which had no beauty and which was poor. How insufferably muddling it all is!

Mr. Moore also took strong exception to my description of certain work by Mr. J. F. Hendry as verbal surrealism. Why? Is not surrealism an art practised openly and unashamedly even to-day? That it has had its day, as all things incomprehensible must, sooner or later, is not to make it dishonourable. Therefore the word casts no reflection, of the sort which Mr. Moore should resent, upon his friend. He practises an art which has had its vogue and if The Poetry Society, recalling the first word of its title, desires gently to distinguish this sort of work from that word, is it not justified?

Then Mr. Moore makes a point. He says that I should not be allowed to get away with this and other enormities. I applaud. My cause being better than his I shall be glad to take off my coat with him whenever he likes. There is nothing I should like better than to play John the Baptist in the trackless wilderness of "Little Giddings" whenever Mr. Moore moves my spirit to prophecy and denunciation.

Again, he will be wrong to continue to think that if we disagree with him we shall betray our duty of creating for the public a standard of taste. It may be, though it would be unbecoming to say it, that that is the only way in which it can be done; and Lord Wavell, whose name has been mentioned by Mr. Moore in this very connection, has certainly rebutted in advance any suggestion that he holds The Poetry Society responsible for any injury to poetry or its cause, by becoming recently a Vice-President. His Lordship, so far from blaming our "generalised inaccuracy and lack of thought," which Mr. Moore conceives to be the danger, has evidently decided that to honour us with his support is a good way to avert it. What exactly did Lord Wavell say? Mr. Moore's letter is not clear. Where he uses inverted commas, as for a quotation, Mr. Moore makes his Lordship regret "the decline of poetry in the esteem of the general public." Elsewhere Mr. Moore refers to the dearth of good poetry as Lord Wavell's complaint. These are not the same thing—although there is no doubt some connection.

I agree with both personally, making the decline in the public's esteem consequent

upon the aforesaid dearth of good poetry, strongly accenting the word good. Yet the output of what is miscalled poetry is to-day immense and I would put this question to Mr. Moore to see if we can agree upon an answer.

In a material age, where every invention of science seems to be in a conspiracy to distract or destroy mankind, which does he think the more likely, in the short and shortening intervals between the radio, the films and the bombs, to catch and hold the attention of a seduced and harried public, the poem which uses words as a means of communication or one which treats them as the playthings of a poltergeist ?

The Poetry Society, I am sure, will not falter in what it conceives to be its duty. It objects only, but strongly, to obscurity, believing that having evacuated the Tower of Babel, our language should convey with pellucid ease a clear meaning, for which it should not be necessary to enquire through the post at the cost of a twopenny-halfpenny stamp ; and while I am its reviewer it will continue to define poetry in accordance with the inviolable principles of a very great literature imperturbed by the temporary aberrations or the subfuse pretensions of revolutionary innovators.

"THE FINAL INFAMY"

I should like to crave the space of a few lines on the matter of *The Final Infamy*, the remarkable poem by H. L. Senior, which was reviewed in the September-December number of THE POETRY REVIEW. This book came into my hands when I had just been perusing an anthology of modern verse which I had bought, because it is one's duty to keep *au courant* with "contemporary trends" in British literature. I had scanned its unsatisfactory pages from A to Z, had noted its differing schools, each rivalling the other in paucity of diction, had observed the complete absence of nobility of thought and of manner of telling, although it had run the gamut of most of the other emotions experienced by man in his earthly passage. There had been an interesting dissertation upon obsequies ; a physiological essay which smacked more of Aristotle than of Horace and a valuable and practical reminder of English gutter phrases from a gentleman who sits on committees. It was all very instructive, but I was glad when I had brought to a conclusion what was at best a frolic or a curvet of folly and at worst a very unworthy publication. I laid down this manual of mistaken emotions with a feeling of shame that such stuff could be written and given the light of day when one knew what was going on "out there."

It was with great pleasure that H. L. Senior's poem fell into my hands. It is not a war-poem but a poem how to prevent war, an exposure down the years of the world's history of the harm and misery that has been occasioned by the conquerors of men, arising first from selfishness and secondly from the false god of Wealth who has implemented it.

H. L. Senior shows us the philosophers, the poets, the artists and the musicians, as the protesting force against the spate of carnal achievement called war. Christ, Himself, is depicted as the Supreme Poet in being and Prince of Peace.

The writer of this great concept has told us his story in a stanzaed sequence of great dignity. His grave and beautiful lines and finely narrated passages are full of imagination and truthful significance. The idea that if the peasant Christ and the emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius could have met, the fate that befell so many would have been averted is surely a display of fancy worthy of a great poet, and I cannot agree with your reviewer that, because they themselves were human, H. L. Senior is wrong in advancing his theory that the poets, the philosophers, the artists and the musicians have been the rebuking force against a warring world. It is by *the works* of these men and not by their earthly frailties that they must be judged,

and surely how little has art and philosophy done to foster war and hatred when compared with "the swords of Caesars." It was Earl Baldwin who told us that he was, on retiring, going to devote himself to the study of the poets because, unlike some men of science, "they had done so little harm in the world."

There are some minor points with which I am in disagreement with the writer of this poem. His stanza against the Stock Exchange, his inexplicit attitude towards wealth and his suggestions that at the time of Oliver Cromwell all was well in a world of freedom and of art; these are little fanatical mistakes and I will not allow them to stand in the way of the support and praise that I feel is due to this great challenge and rebuke of existing systems. It would be very valuable if H. L. Senior would write us another essay, dotting the *i*'s and crossing the *t*'s of his theories, explaining as best he can how a world could be fashioned to manipulate wealth and the power of the artist and give to the toiler the leisure he demands for him in the final passages of his great work, of which I append one stanza:

They must have leisure for their eyes to feed
Upon the coloured life of banished fear,
No longer grey and drab from bitter need;
And leisure for their damaged ears to hear
The glorious herald of the day new-born,
The birds' majestic chorus of the dawn.

Clifford, Hereford, December 28th, 1943. ARTHUR ROW, F.R.S.A.

"WHERE ARE THE WAR POETS?"

It is an essential part of my war-time duties to travel about the British Isles, and I have been surprised to discover that not only is there an awakening interest in poetry throughout the general reading public, but that there is also an increasing number of writers concerning themselves with poetry as an adequate form of expression.

Although most of the younger poets are in the Forces or other branches of National Service, and in spite of the difficulties of war-time restrictions, they continue their essential task in the form of broadsheets or poetry folios. Poems are being written in billets, factory canteens, hotel lounges, crowded bars and isolated huts; on active service or inbetween working shifts. Poets are concentrating upon the problems of to-day and to-morrow. This is the answer to that recurring question, "Where are the War Poets."

In the belief that such poets are performing a public service, I am collecting their work for publication in a poetry folio entitled *Outposts,* to be printed by the Favil Press. I should like to make it clear that I am not connected with any particular school of poetry—the only criterion will be quality of writing.

59 Orchard Avenue, Squires Gate, Blackpool. HOWARD SERGEANT.

CRITICS OF REVIEWERS

As my books, including Mr. Herbert Palmer's *Post-Victorian Poetry,* are in war-time storage with the rest of my *lares et penates,* one-hundred-and-fifty miles away, I am unable by verification to take up Mr. Palmer's challenge in your September-December issue. I do not know if he includes my letter in *John O'London's Weekly* as "verging on the libellous" and damaging to him as a critic and poet. He also (of myself or Mr. Peschemann ?) uses the adjective "maliciously" in connection with this correspondence. May I ask Mr. Palmer, ever so diffidently, whether, if I bore towards him any malice, or if I had any desire to damage him as a writer, I should have been responsible for introducing him as an authentic poet to Miss Nancy Price, in consequence of which he gave a joint reading of his work with me at the Playhouse, just before the war ? TERESA HOOLEY.